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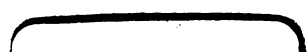
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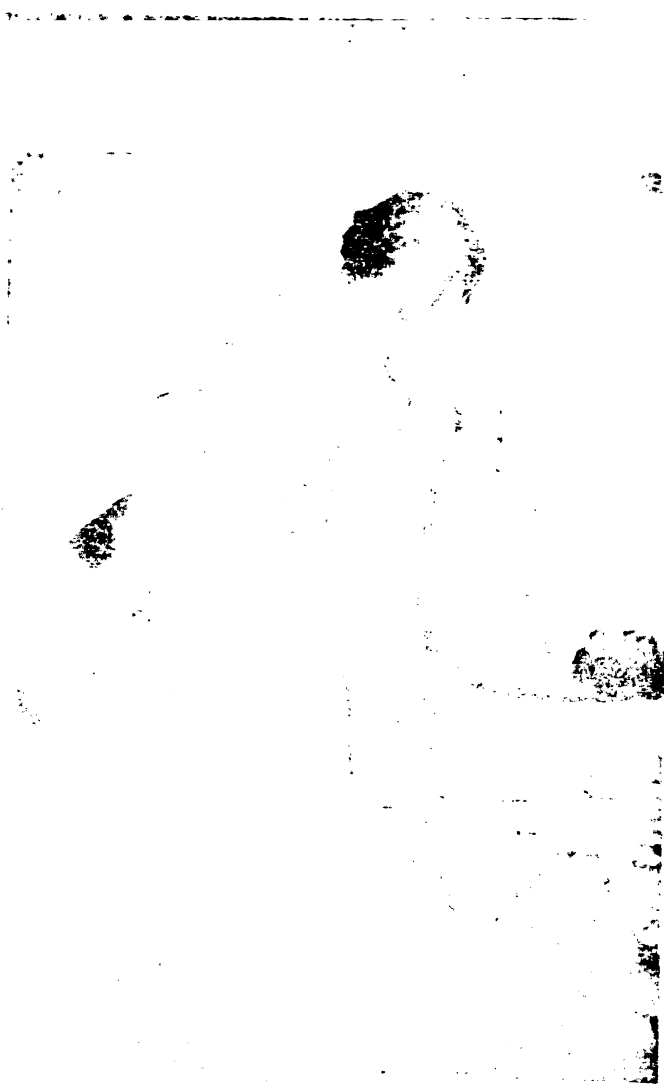


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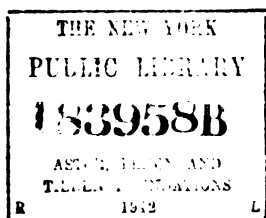


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“ Westward on the low sweet strand
Where songs are sung of the old green Irish land,
And the sky loves it, and the sea loves best,
And as a bird is taken to man's breast
The sweet-souled land where sorrow sweetest sings
Is wrapt round with them as with hands and wings
And taken to the sea's heart as a flower ”

SWINEBURNE.



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By Beach and Bog-land

IN THE WINDING WALK

I

WHEN people go away from Clonmalroan, they go away, as a rule, very thoroughly. Their absence is an absence more complete than that of other persons from other places less out of the world and behind the times. Once any traveller' departing form has been beheld pass round the turn in the deep-banked boreen, or watched dwindle into a speck on the straight road streaking the wide bog-land, the chances are that little news of him will reach his former neighbours, till some day that same speck is espied growing into human shape again along that same road, and acquaintances remark to each other in the course of conversation: "And so big Pat Byrne"—to put case—"is afther comin' home wid himself."

For Clonmalroan is but meagrely provided with the means of communication, and its

inhabitants are mostly ill able to make use even of those which it possesses. It is as yet untouched by the wonderful thread of wire, which has put a running-string through the web of human lives—puckered up in a moment from Hong Kong to Cambridge—and the shining metals with their rush and roar, still halting many miles short of it, are lamely prolonged by the wheel tracks of the jiggeting side-car with a slenderly filled mail-bag on the well. The letters it brings are commonly brief and obscure, the difficult product of certainly no excessive ease in composition. They convey little more than an intimation of continued existence led among surroundings only mistily imagined by readers whose own journeying has lain within the radius of a day's tramp. Beyond that limit everything is vague and dim, a mysterious region from whence the absentee seems not so very much more likely to reappear than do those who have been seen off with a wake and a keen. Not that such returns even as these are by any means unheard of at Clonmalroan. Would the friends of Michael Larissy, who duly waked and buried him three years ago, aver that they have never set eyes on him since? Or ask anybody, almost, in the parish, why he wouldn't take half a crown to be crossing after nightfall that bridge over the Rosbride River near Sallinbeg, where a poor tinker-woman was swept away and drowned in a flood some few autumns back. Then, everybody knows that several of the Denny family have

"walked." Therefore the assertion: "It was himself or his ghost," is not regarded as containing a very unequally balanced hypothesis, especially if "himself" has been supposed away sojourning in those unknown and imperfectly reported lands.

But there came one autumn when far and far away from Clonmalroan began to happen events which had such a heart-burning interest for many of its people that some news of them did penetrate the densest barriers of ignorant resourcelessness. Mere sparks, perhaps, as it were blown from some huge conflagration, whose distant flames make only a sullen glare behind a smothering smoke-fog. Yet a spark may blacken a body's home over her head, or sear the sight out of her eyes. A great war was thundering and lightening across wide seas, under alien skies: a war which in no way behoved Clonmalroan, and which might have stormed itself out, little heeded there, had it not been for the circumstance that Pat and Micky and their brethren are "terrible lads for goin' an' listin'," and that the regiment they had for the most part joined was understood to be "up at the forefront of everythin'."

After a while, moreover, it was not those wild, irresponsible boys alone that this lurid cloud engulfed in threatening glooms. The reserves were called out, people said, at first without any clear notion of what the phrase might signify, but soon perceiving too plainly how it meant that men whose soldiering days were long past and nearly

forgotten, except just the little pension, must now break the ties they had peaceably formed and once more set forth campaigning. Murtagh O'Connor, of Naracor, had to leave a wife and five children on his bit of a holding "in a quare distraction," his friends reported, "for when he was killed, what could happen them but the Union?" And many another household on that countryside had to consider the same woeful question.

So all round and about Clonmalroan there came to be an intense craving for the latest war intelligence. Never had newspapers been in such request. At Donnelly's bar the *Freeman* and the *Independent* were as badly tattered as strips of ill-preserved papyri by the end of an evening's reading. The Widdy Gallaher "would be walkin' wild about the country the len'th of the day," folk said, "for the sight of a one. Be raison," they added, "of her two sons." And another illiterate and sceptical old Mrs Linders for similar reasons "was tormintin' everybody to read her out every word there would be on the paper, even if they tould her 'twas only the market prices." The elders, indeed, were often at a disadvantage in this way, owing to the inferior educational arrangements under which their generation had risen. Big Brian O'Flaherty, who had an independent and ambitious spirit, demeaned himself to set about learning the alphabet from that little spalpeen, Larry M'Crilly, in hopes of subsequently reading his news "and no thanks to anybody." But Larry was impatient and sarcastic, and Big

Brian slow-witted and irascible, so the course of lessons one day ended abruptly with "a clout on the head" to the taunting teacher. With more modest aspirations old John Connellan got the schoolmaster to print for him, "the way it would be on the paper," the name of Private Patrick Connellan; and he might be seen on many a cold day sitting out on the rimy grass bank before his dark door, for the sake of the light, and comparing with this scrap the unintelligible lines of the *Independent*. It was very slow, puzzling work, since the columns were many and lengthy, and his eyes none of the best. Old John seldom could retain the loan of the wide sheets long enough to assure himself completely that his grandson's name was happily absent from them. For no news was certainly the best that could be looked for from the papers. What, indeed, was likely to happen a lad save one of those casualties which were so briefly recorded. "Och, woman dear, they're sayin' at Donnelly's that there's a terrible sight of officers kilt on the *Freeman* to-day, so there'll prisently be a cruel big list of the rank and file. God be good to us all, woman dear—and poor Micky and the rest. I'm wonderin' will they be apt to print it to-morra."

Thus the winter, always at Clonmalroan a season when cares and losses are rife, was beyond its wont harassed and haunted by fear and sorrow. The calling away on active service of the Captain from the Big House was one of its incidents that

tended to deepen the general depression. His stalwart form and sturdy stride and off-hand greeting were missed going to and fro, and much commiseration was directed to "poor Lady Winifred, and she not so long married, the crathur, left all alone by herself up at the Big House."

II

It was only comparatively speaking a big house at all, though it made some architectural pretensions with its pillared front and porch and balustraded roof. Its lower windows looked out of a spacious hall, and a few ill-proportioned sitting-rooms ; upstairs rambling passages and wide-floored lobbies cramped the uncomfortable bedchambers. Disrepair prevailed within and without, ranging from the rough work of wind and weather to the minuter operations of mouse and moth. Even at its best, all had been ugly and inconvenient enough. Nevertheless to become mistress thereof Lady Winifred had not merely left a far statelier and more luxurious establishment, but had quitted it under a cloud of disapproval, with an assurance that she was taking a long step down in the world. For her Captain was a person so impecunious and impossible, with such an unsuccessful past career, and such unsatisfactory future prospects, that nobody could imagine what she saw in him, and everybody thought the worse of her for seeing it,

whatever it might be. The marriage was just not discountenanced and forbidden outright, but most austere visages were turned upon it, and the wedding, Lady Astermount's maid declared, "couldn't have been quieter if an affliction had occurred in the family only the previous week."

Notwithstanding that inauspicious send-off, however, Captain and Lady Winifred O'Reilly passed a surprisingly pleasant year at this shabby old house of his among the bog-lands. Lonesome and monotonous are the bog-lands, and creep up very close to the Big House ; but it stands set in a miniature glen of its own, with a wreath of shrubberies around it, and during the months after they arrived the O'Reillys busied themselves much about additional trees and evergreens, wherewith to screen their domain more effectually from the dreary outlook and roughly sweeping winds in the years that were to come. Many improvements, too, had to be made in neglected plots of garden ground, where the Captain looked at geraniums and pansies and carnations through another person's eyes, until at last he saw something in them himself, and learned with extreme pride to call them by their proper names. This lore gave him more pleasure on the whole than he had ever derived from his familiarity with the colours worn by jockeys or stamped on playing cards, studies which had hitherto engrossed a larger share of his attention. His wife and he diversified their gardening with long rides together on steeds not

expensively high bred. Clonmalroan opinion waxed somewhat critical when the pair came trotting by. Her ladyship, they said, didn't look the size of a wren perched on that big, rawny baste of a chestnut, with an ugly, coarse gob of a head on him too, and the brown mare was something slight for his Honour, who must ride well up to fourteen stone. But the riders themselves were satisfied with their mounts.

Their contentment had showed no signs of waning in that mild November weather, with its pearl-white mists and wafted odour of burning weeds, when the likelihood of his going out loomed up suddenly on their horizon. The certain news came one morning, while they were working away near the back gate, where their small bog stream flows under steep banks, on which they had designed a plantation of rhododendrons. In the black peat soil these thrive amain, and by next June would have lit a many-hued glow in the shadowy little glen. Lady Winifred tried hard not to see that this interruption of their labours was to the Captain scarcely such an unmitigated calamity as to herself. Her recognition of the fact made her feel doubly desolate; not that there was more difference in their sentiments than had to be in the nature of things, or than left him otherwise than miserable at their parting. She tried further to go on with the plantation, as he would no doubt return in time to see it in blossom; but she was relieved when a spell of bad weather presently set in and let her

stay indoors. Yet indoors it seemed as if the whole solitude of the great bog had pressed into the empty house. All day it said, wherever she went, upstairs or downstairs, one word to vex her : *Gone*. But at night she had various fortunes in dreams good and evil.

And every morning at breakfast, in the low, broad-windowed bookroom, she sat opposite to the Captain's place, just as usual, except that the place was empty. She chose that seat because from it she could watch for old Christy Denny coming by from Salinbeg post-office with the mail-bag. That window looked out on a small lawn, bounded by a shrubbery through which a path ran leading round a corner of the house to the front door. The laurel bushes straggled into frequent gaps, so that between them the approach of a passer-by could be fitfully descried. And any morning might bring the letter for her, the foreign letter. To think of how it was perhaps in those very moments journeying towards her in the battered old brown bag made her so hungry and thirsty that she sometimes forgot to pour out her tea, or cut the over-large loaf. Nor was she always disappointed. Every now and then a letter did come, and in its re-reading she would find a refuge through the terrors of the day, as in a flattering dream by night. All the while, indeed, she knew that she was in a fool's paradise : that, being so many weeks old, it could give her no assurance of its writer's safety. The hands that had folded its sheets might ere now have grown cold beside some

far-off stream, where geysers of deadly hail broke out rattling on the hills, and the wide air was as full of murderous stings as a swamp of sweltering venom. She might more rationally rely upon the newspapers with their flashed tidings. But these she never dared open herself, and she could not forbear to hang her hopes upon that delusive correspondence.

One midwinter morning she came down to breakfast with her heart set more than ever eagerly upon the arrival of old Christy. Partly because she had not had a letter for longer than usual, and partly because it was Saturday, and on Sunday no mail comes in Sallinbeg. This last was of course no reason at all for expecting a letter ; but it did seem to her almost improbable that Fate could intend such harshness as to make her wait two whole days and nights before she could begin hoping again. So she looked out of the window with shining eyes, and set about crumbling the bread on her plate before she had tasted a bit, and thought Christy was late before he had well started on his two-mile trudge. It was hard weather, and on the corner of lawn she looked into lay a sprinkling of frozen snow ; only a sprinkling ; she had seen it whiter last June with daisies spread to the sun. But the frost was keen, as she would have felt by the air blowing through the open window if she had been at leisure to consider anything except the possibility of their bringing the sound of footsteps on the hardened path.

Old Christy was late really, and she listened in vain. When at length he did come, she saw him first, a shadow moving along within the still shadow of the laurels. Just opposite to the window a gap in them made a ragged arch, and Lady Winifred knew that if Christy had anything special for her he would come through the opening and straight across the grass to her, instead of following the path round the house to the hall door. For a minute, a half-happy minute of doubt, she watched him nearing the fateful place, fearful, hopeful, blindly impatient, and then—stunned. Old Christy had gone past the gap, hurrying a little it seemed, as if he wished to get out of sight. This in fact he did. "Sure now, the mistress's face is all eyes these times," he said to Mrs Keogh in the kitchen, "and lookin' at me they do be like as if she thought bad of me not bringin' her aught. But bedad if she could see to the bottom of me heart, she'd know it's sorry I am I haven't got somethin' for her at the bottom of th' ould bag. Troth would she so;" and Mrs Keogh replied: "Ah, sure it's frettin' she is; goodness may pity the crathur, she's frettin'. And doesn't ait what would fatten a sparrow. It's my belief she'll do no good."

The mistress did not appear to be fretting as she sat without motion, and still gazed out over the lawn. Though its aspect was quite unchanged, it had become a grave wherein her hope, newly slain, must lie buried until the sun had set and risen, and again set and risen. Even by the

uncertain measure of years, the mistress was very young yet, and otherwise younger still, so that the edges of the experiences which make up life had not been worn smooth for her, to expedite their slipping past. A whole day looked nearly as interminable to her as to a small child, who gets out of bed with no clear prospect of ever getting into it again. And now her own bedtime lay beyond more than twelve leaden-footed hours, so early was this desolate, sunny morning. It seemed late, however, to some of her neighbours, who were keeping round eyes on her movements, and considered her as tardy as she had been thinking Christy. Perhaps a chirp or a rustle may have reached and prompted her unawares, or perhaps she merely acted from habit, but by-and-by she got up and scattered her plateful of crumbs upon the rimy window ledge, where they lay like a little drift of discoloured snow. As she strewed them she said to herself bitterly towards Fate, and ruthfully towards fellow-victims: "Why should the birds go hungry because I have no letter?" and she was careful to shut down the window sash, lest the sleek black cat should, according to custom, lurk ambushed within to pounce upon a preoccupied prey. Then she stood aside, half hidden by the faded crimson curtain, and looked out at nothing with a cold ache in her heart.

The small birds arrived in headlong haste. Some of them were almost pecking before the window closed. For the frost's tyranny had

made of not a few among them desperate characters, fluttering with reckless enterprise. Even a scutty wren ventured out of cover, and advanced along the ledge in a dotted line of tiny hops, scarcely less smooth than a mouse's run. A robin redbreast alighting brought a gleam of colour something brighter than a withered beech leaf and duller than a poppy petal. Two tomtits in comic motley suits disputed with tragic audacity the claims of all their *biggers*—thrushes, blackbirds, finches and sparrows. The whole party twittered and fluttered and wrangled together, blithe and pugnacious, but the spreader of the feast gave no heed to any of its incidents. She smiled neither at the abrupt gobblings of the large golden bill, nor at the absurd defiances of the blue-and-yellow dwarfs. Her act of charity seemed to have gained her nothing. Then all at once, at some caprice of panic, the assembled birds whisked themselves down from the window-stool into the gravel walk below. Each one of them bore off in his beak a breadcrumb which looked like a little white envelope, and gave him the appearance of a letter-carrier. The sudden movement caught Lady Winifred's attention, and she was struck by the fantastic resemblance. But at the same moment she remembered keenly how she had been reft of her hope for that day and the next ; and immediately, as if the frost at her heart were broken up, she saw the mock letters through a rain of tears. She had not foregone her recompense after all.

III

NEAR the back gates of Lady Winifred's Big House, the Widdy Connor's very little one makes a white dot on the edge of the black bog-land that winds away towards Lisconnel. She lived in it quite alone after her son Terence had listed on her, which he did one winter when times were hard and work was scarce. Everybody almost concurred in the opinion that there "wasn't apt to be such another grand-lookin' soldier in the regiment as young Terry Connor, or in an army of regiments bedad." For Terry's good looks and good nature and athletic prowess were celebrated round and about Clonmalroan. Six foot three in his stockings, and not a lad to stand up to him at the wrestling; there wasn't another as big a man in the parish, unless it might be the Captain.

But, of course, it was not in the nature of things that anyone else should equal the extravagant pride and pleasure in those pre-eminent qualities evinced by Terry's mother. She made a show of herself over him, according to the view entertained by some matrons with smaller sons; and now and then, when the widow had exceeded unusually in vaingloriousness, one of them might be heard to predict that, "she'd find she'd get none the better thratement from him for cockin' him up wid consait; little enough he'd be thinkin' of

her, or mindin' what she bid him." The widow for her part always declared that "the only thing he'd ever done agin her in his life was listin'; and that he'd never ha' thought of if the both of them hadn't been widin to-morra mornin' of starvation." And perhaps the affliction which that step caused her was not so very far from being made amends for by her exulting delight in the splendour of his martial aspect when he came over to visit her on furlough in his scarlet with green facings beautiful to behold. One of those carping critics declared to goodness after Mass, that she had come into chapel with him "lookin' as sot up as if she was after catchin' some sort of glittery angel flyin' about wild, and had a hold of him by the wing."

But then at that time the regiment was safely quartered at Athlone, a place no such terribly long way off, and known to have been actually visited by ordinary people. It was a woefully different matter when the Connemaras were sent off on active service to strange lands about which all one's knowledge could be summed up in the words "furrin" and "fightin'"—words of limitless fear. Then it was that retribution might be deemed to have lighted upon her inordinate vanity about her son's conspicuous stature. For this now became a source of special torment, as threatening to make him the better mark, singling him out for peculiar peril.

"And you'll be plased to tell him, Mr Mulcahy," she dictated to the schoolmaster, who

was also cobbler and scribe at Clonmalroan, "that whatever he does he's not to be runnin' into the forefront of the firin', and he a head and shoulders higher than half of the lads. He'd be hit first thing. God be good to us. Bid him to be croochin' down back of somethin' handy. Or if there was ne'er a rock or a furze bush on the bit of bog, he might anyway keep stopped behind the others. But if he lets them get aimin' straight at him, he's lost."

Mr Mulcahy, who was stirring up the sediment of his lately watered ink, received these suggestions about conduct in the field with decided disapproval. "Bedad now, Mrs Connor," he said, "there'd be no sinse in tellin' him any such things. For in the first place he wouldn't mind a word of it, and in the next place—goodness may pity you, woman, but sure you wouldn't be wishful to see him comin' back to you after playin' the poltroon, and behavin' himself discreditable?"

"Troth and I would," said Mrs Connor. "If he was twinty poltroons. All the behavin' I want of him's to be bringin' himself home. Who's any the betther for the killin' and slaughterin'? The heart's weary in me doubtin' will I ever get a sight of him agin. That's all I'm thinkin' of, tellin' you the truth, and if I said anythin' diffrint it 'ud be a lie."

"He might bring home a trifle of honour and glory, and no harm done," Mr Mulcahy urged. But Mrs Connor said: "Glory be bothered"; and

in the end he only so far modified his instructions as to substitute for her more detailed injunctions a vague general order to "be takin' care of himself."

It may perhaps be considered another righteous judgment upon this most un-Spartan mother, that while these precautions of hers were entirely neglected, little of the honour and glory which she had flouted did attend the fate of her Terry. He was shot through the lungs by a rifle posted a mile or two distant from the dusty hillock on which he dropped, and where he lay gasping and choking for what seemed to him a vastly long time, before the night fell suddenly dark and cold, and not to pass away. As this particular casualty was not discovered till the next morning, his name did not appear on the list which Barny Keogh spelled over to the Widdy Connor a few days later, and at the end of which she said fervently: "Thanks be to the great God. There's no sign of himself in it." But on the very next evening, a half line in the *Freeman* ran: "*Add to Killed: Private T. Connor;*" and when Peter Egan down below at Donnell's read it out by chance, the widdy, listening, felt as if she had just wakened up into a dim sort of nightmare. All the more she felt so, because everybody round her was saying: "May the Lord have mercy on his soul," as if anybody could believe that Terry had really become to them a subject for such pious ejaculations. So she hurried back through the wide spaces of the bleak March gloaming to

her little, silent house, where she shut herself in to sleep off her dream. But it woke up with her in the grey of the early dawning.

Lady Winifred's Captain was killed about the same time as Terry Connor, and, like him, without anything specially glorious in the circumstances of his death. Rather the contrary. The occasion of it was a minor disaster to the arms of his side—a check, a reverse—over which it could not be but that someone had blundered. In point of fact a highly-distinguished General, dictating a draft report of the same to his discreet Secretary, had expressed an opinion that the regrettable incident had been brought about by want of judgment on the part of the commanding officer, the late Captain O'Reilly, when the younger man coughed significantly, and casually remarked: "Ah, O'Reilly—he married one of Lord Astermount's daughters—the third, I think, Lady Winifred, a little fair girl. Her people didn't like the match at all, I believe, but still—" His chief appeared scarcely to notice the observation: but Captain O'Reilly's want of judgment was not mentioned in despatches.

IV

WHEN their world came to an end for the widow, Lady Winifred O'Reilly, and the widow, Katty Connor, the bog-land was just beginning to turn springwards, and everything on it stirred under

the strengthening sunshine. Round about the Big House the birds, who now despised bread-crumbs because other food wriggled abundantly in the dewy grass, sang much and gleefully in the fresh mornings, and through the long golden light as it ebbed off the lawn. But Lady Winifred, looking out no more for letters, sought a refuge from it all in the bookroom, which was a dusky brown place in the brightest hours. There she sat on the floor in a corner before a far-stretching row of *Annual Registers*, and read them volume by volume. She had chosen this course of study just as she might have chosen the top of an adjacent rubbish heap in a suddenly surging flood. Steadily through she read them without skipping—*History of Europe*—*Chronicle*—*State Papers*—*Characters*—*Useful Projects*, even when they included the specification of Dr Higgen's patent for a newly-invented water cement or stucco—*Poetry*, even when it was by the Laureate William Whitehead. That is to say, her eyes travelled down and down the double columns where the faded ink was less distinct than the damp stains which mottled the margin. It may be doubted whether they conveyed many thoughts to her brain, but they blocked the way to others. One of the most definite impressions she received was a feeling of resentment towards those persons who were recorded to have lived a hundred years and upwards in full possession of all their faculties.

One showery afternoon in the last days of May,

Lady Winifred was interrupted in the middle of the events of the year 1783 by the entrance of Rose Ahern, the housemaid, who came to take leave of her. Rose, who was now summoned home to tend an invalided mother, had lived longer at the Big House than its mistress, and often remarked these times that "anybody'd be annoyed to see her mopin', and the two of them that gay and plisant together only a half twelve-month back." On this occasion, having repeatedly said : "So good-bye to you kindly, me lady, and may God lave your Ladyship your health," she continued inconsistently to linger in her place, making small sounds and movements designed to attract attention. But Lady Winifred had reverted to her volume twenty-six, and was inaccessible to any save point-blank address. At last Rose went almost to the door, and turned round to say : "I beg your pardon, me lady—beggin' your Ladyship's pardon—but what colour might the Master's uniform be, me lady? None of us ever seen his Honour wearin' it, it so happens."

"It was scarlet, I believe," Lady Winifred said, continuing to look at the pages. "Oh, yes, scarlet."

"There now, didn't I tell Thady so?" said Rose. "And he standin' me out 'twas blue it was, the way it couldn't ha' been him we seen; and declarin' 'twas apter to be poor Terry Connor, thinkin' of his mother. But sure it's a good step to her house from

where we seen him — whoever he was—last night."

"*Saw him last night,*" Lady Winifred said, looking up ("And indeed now," Rose averred afterwards, "'twas like openin' a crack of a window—her eyes shinin' out of the dark corner "). "Oh, Rose, what are you saying? "

"'Deed, then, maybe I'm talkin' like a fool, me lady," said Rose, "and you've no call to be mindin' me. Only when I was seein' me brother Thady down to the back gate last night, there was somebody in a red coat at the far end of the Windin' Walk, there was so, and a big man too. And this mornin' I heard several sayin' there did be a soldier seen in it this while since of an evenin'. But sorra a one's stoppin' anywheres next or nigh Clonmalroan. It's the quare long step he's apt to have come—between us and harm. And I dunno what should be bringin' poor Terry Connor there, instead of to his own little place ; but the poor Master always had a great wish for the Windin' Walk. Many a time have I seen him meself smokin' up and down it, before ever he got married ; and last year he was a dale in it along with yourself, me lady, lookin' after the wee bushes plantin' —beggin' your Ladyship's pardon. And all the while very belike it might ha' been just a shadow under the moonlight ; only red it was, that's sartin. But people do be talkin' foolish, your Ladyship. And may God lave your Ladyship your health. It was as like as not to be nothin' at all."

"Oh, very likely," Lady Winifred said, indifferently, "nothing at all."

V

BUT that evening she left the house once more. She had intended to wait until dusk, but its slow oncoming wore out her patience, and there were still rich gleams and glows receding among the furthest tree trunks when she stole forth into the open air. It breathed freshly fragrant on her, after her many weeks in the mouldering mustiness of the bookroom, and the blackbirds were singing with notes clear as the gathering dews and mellow as the westering light. The season was now the late autumn of spring, when most blossoms are falling, though the young leaves are yet in their first luminous green. On the lawn the laburnums and thorn bushes stood with their outlines enamelled on the grass in gold and pearl and pink coral. Along the shaded avenue and shrubby paths lay softly drifts of dimmer blossoms and blossom dust, in faint ambers and russets and crimsons. But the white plumes of the Guelder roses were still glimmering ghostly above her head as she went by, and some of the firs were studded all over with little pale-yellow tapers like wild Christmas trees.

Lady Winifred was going towards the back gate, and presently came where the Winding Walk, under a dense canopy of evergreens, runs

parallel with the avenue, on the right hand, and on the left within hearing of the fretted, rocky stream in the bit of a glen below. Once between the screening laurels and junipers, you could see, however, only up and down short curves of the waving path. About midway in it was a rustic wooden seat, niched in a recess of the shrubs, and Lady Winifred intended to sit down there and wait and watch. But when she reached it, she found it already occupied by someone who had also been watching, as was clearly seen in the look that leaped forward to meet the newcomer, and at sight recoiled again. In this tall woman, with a black shawl over frosted dark hair, Lady Winifred recognised the Widow Connor concerning whom, ages ago, before the days of the *Annual Registers*, she half remembered to have heard about the loss of a soldier son. The older widow was rising up with many apologies for the boldness of slipping in there, never thinking any of the family would be coming out; and she would have gone away, but the other hastened to sit down beside her, and kept a hand on her shawl. "I won't stay myself unless you do," said Lady Winifred. "I only came out because it was so warm," she explained, as she had been explaining to herself, "and such a fine evening."

"Tellin' you the truth, me lady," said the Widdy Connor, "me poor Terry himself would sometimes be smokin' a pipe in here of an evenin' when there was nobody about. I was tellin' him

he'd a right to not be makin' so free—but sure, after all, he done no harm. There's great shelter under the shrubberies when the weather does be soft—and be the same token, we do be gettin' a little shower this minyit, me lady; that's what's rustlin' in the laves. So 'twould be nathural enough if Terry was mindin' the place. But trespassin' or annoyin' the family now, he'd never be intendin'. Just comin' of an odd evenin' he might be, the way he used. Anyhow Paudeen Nolan and Jim M'Kenna was positive 'twas him they seen, and they all goin' home from the hurley match. The other lads said diff'rint; but that Anthony Martin's a big stookawn, and his brother's as blind as the owls. Nor I wouldn't go be what Rose Ahern says—"

"Rose has very good sight," said Lady Winifred.

"Ah, then you're after hearin' the talk, me lady?" said the widow. "Faix now, they'd no call to be tellin' you wrong, and bringin' you out under the wet for nothin', to get your death of cold. Because Terry it was, whatever they may say. But there's wonderful foolishness in people. For some of them says they wouldn't believe any such a thing; so what *would* they believe at all? And more of them says it's a bad sign for anybody to be walkin' that way. And what badness is there in it, if a lad would be takin' a look at a place he had a likin' for, and where he might get a chance of seein' his frinds? And it's the quare sort of unluckiness 'twould be for one of

them to git a sight of him, if 'twas only goin' by, and ne'er a word out of him. That's what I was sayin' this mornin' to ould Theresa Joyce. For says she to me: 'It's unlucky,' says she. 'And you'd do bettther to be wishin' he'd bide paiceable wherever he is, till yourself comes along to him,' says she. But it's aisy for Theresa Joyce to be talkin', and she as ould as a crow. She can't be livin' any great while longer, so I was sayin' to her; and it's somethin' else she'd be wishin' if she'd no more age on her than meself. Sure I was reckonin' up, me lady, accordin' to things that happint, and at the most I can make it I'm short of fifty years. That's lavin' a terrible long time to be contintin' oneself in."

"And I'm twenty," said Lady Winifred.

"Well, now the Lord may pity you, and may goodness forgive me," the widow said compunctionously as if she had somehow been an accomplice of this cruel fate, and were all at once smitten with remorse. She seemed to ponder for a while deeply, and at last said: "If be any odd chance it isn't Terry after all, and only the Captain—I won't be grudgin' it to her; no, the crathur, I will not."

Thereupon silence continued long between the two watchers, and nothing befell them except that their blackness was gradually softened into the shadows as cobweb-coloured dusk enmeshed them.

Then there came a moment when the older woman saw the younger start, and, quivering

like a bough after it has bent to a waft of wind, look fixedly in one direction. "In the name of God, do you see anythin', me lady?" Widdy Connor whispered, and as she spoke she saw too. For a small rent in the straggling laurel on their right made a spy-hole, which brought within view a curve of the Winding Walk near its gate end, many yards away, and there, moving and glimpsing in the twilight, from which it seemed to have absorbed the last lingering brightness, went a gleam of scarlet. It was coming towards the seat, and the faces turned that way looked as if a white moonbeam had fallen across them. Almost immediately branches rustled close by, and out into the path a girl hooded with a fawn-coloured shawl stepped warily on the left hand, and stood poising herself for a swift dart past the recess, unintercepted if not unobserved. Lady Winifred could not have noticed the leap of an ambushed tiger; but her companion sprang up and caught the girl by the wrist. "Norah Grehan," said the widow. "And who at all are you watching for this night? Me son Terry was spakin' to ne'er a girl, I well know. He'd have told me, so he would. Who are you lookin' to see?"

"Och, Mrs Connor, ma'am, lave go of me," the girl said, twisting her arm and struggling. "And don't let on to anybody that you seen me, or there'll be murdher. It's Jack M'Donnell that's waitin' for me below there. He that listed about Christmas, and now they're sendin' him to the war. He and me are spakin' this good while

back, unbeknownst, be raison of me father makin' up a match for me wid some other man ; I dunno who he is, but I won't have him, not if he owned all the bastes that ever ran on four legs. So I do be slippin' across the steppin'-stones of an evenin' for to get a word with Jack, that comes over the bog from the dear knows how far beyant Lisconnel. And if they knew up at the farm I'd be kilt."

"And maybe the best thing could happen you," said the widow.

"Ah, don't say so, woman dear. He'll be comin' back one of these days for sure, a corporal maybe, or a sargint, with lave to marry. And he's plannin' to conthrive for me to be livin' wid his mother's sisther in Sligo till then, the way they won't get me married on him while he's gone—no fear. He'll be tellin' me about it to-night—and bedad there he is whistlin' to me. Ah, let me go, Mrs Connor ; but whisht, like a good woman," said the girl, wrenching herself free, and speeding away between the half visible dark foliage.

Then Lady Winifred, who had heard the last part of this colloquy, got up also and said : "I think I'll go home now. It's a very pleasant evening, but the air feels rather cold."

"'Deed now you'd a right to not be out under the rain, wid nothin' on the head of you, me lady, but the little muslin cap," said the widow, and added as Lady Winifred went : "And, troth, it's the cruel pity to see the likes of her wearin' any

such a thing, ay indeed is it. Nora Grehan and Jack M'Donnell, sure now the two of them's at the beginnin', and she's at the endin'. But there's an endin' in every beginnin', and maybe, plase God, there's a beginnin' in every endin'."

Lady Winifred, meanwhile, was not pitying herself. As she walked slowly back to her empty Big House, along paths odorous with the rain whose drops began to pierce their leafiest roofs, she felt again a stunned disappointment, only vaguer and more chilling than the overdue letter had caused her. And there were no little birds about now to mock her into keener consciousness. After all, things were just as they had been when she set out, no worse surely, and how could they be better, except in a dream? But a dream she might have before to-morrow came, and brought back her long day in the brown book-room with the companionship of the *Annual Registers*. There were still so many unread of the dusty volumes, clasped with blackish cobwebs, made ghastly now and then by the shrivelled skeleton of the dead spinster. She need not yet consider what she should do when they were all finished.

As the Widdy Connor went towards her little silent house, she was saying to herself: "Jack M'Donnell bedad! Sure the height of him isn't widin the breadth of me hand of Terry; everybody knows that. It's my belief 'twasn't Jack they seen that time at all. They couldn't ha' mistook him for Terry, the tallest lad in this

countryside. . . . And says I to Theresa Joyce :
'The heart of me did be leppin' up wid pride
every time I'd see him have to stoop his head,
comin' in to me at our little low door. But it's
lower his head's lyin' now,' says I, 'low enough
it's lyin'.' And says she to me : 'If 'twas ever
so low, the heart of you'll be leppin' up twice as
high wid joy and plisure,' says she, 'the next time
you behould him.' But, ah sure, it's aisy talkin'.
I'll see him come stoopin' in at it no more."

[*A dramatised version of this story will be found in the author's
volume: "Ghost Bereft, with Other Stories and Studies in
Verse," published by Messrs Smith & Elder.*]





A MONEY-CROP AT LISCONNEL

I

THE Widow M'Gurk flung down a black sod into the midst of the blossom-like pink-and-white embers and ashes on her hearth with a shock that splashed up vivid sparks in all directions, causing a pair of long-legged, panic-stricken chickens to fly higher, far less nimbly, and seek refuge from the startling shower among the rafters overhead. Her action was symbolical, for as she performed it she said : "It's gone ; there's the whole of it. And you might as well be holdin' your tongue till you've got somethin' reasonable to say." As a matter of fact, her niece, Minnie Walsh, had not been making any observations ; but Mrs M'Gurk had some excuse for indiscriminate censoriousness just then, seeing that she referred to the loss of nothing less than what she called "the greatest chance ever she got in her life's len'th." Perhaps that rather long length had really been not more productive of great chances than is usual in the lives of people who dwell on the bog-lands at Lisconnel. Yet her neighbours were disposed to consider that she had enjoyed a somewhat full share of good luck. They all

remembered, for instance, the handsome legacy of half a dozen half-crowns that had once come to her from the States, and some of them would say when discussing her affairs: "And she wid-out a crathur to be thinkin' of only herself." This latter circumstance could, of course, be otherwise stated as the fact that "she had not a soul belonging to her in the wide world to be doing e'er a hand's turn for her"; and when she was first left a childless widow, many years ago, that view had predominated. It still prevailed among most of the older inhabitants, whose children were grown up, and capable of lending a helping hand, sometimes from across the western foam; but they of a younger generation, whose long families were as yet the "burden" which the Gaelic sorrowfully calls them, would speak of her loneliness in a tone implying: "It's well to be her." In this opinion the widow's proudly independent spirit helped to confirm them, her habit being to pose as a prosperous person, resentful of any sympathy which appeared incongruous with that attitude, while she adopted an extension of the principle: "*Tell thou never thy foe that thy foot acheth,*" in this respect treating everyone impartially as an enemy. Here, however, was a quite exceptional occurrence, upon the cruel unluckiness of which the most stoical pride could scarcely be imagined to forbear exclaiming. It came about thus.

Early in the summer, Mrs M'Gurk's portly yellowish hen had hatched her a clutch of eggs

with such singular success that not one of the whole baker's dozen failed to produce its chick, and had brought them up so discreetly and warily that all, save the solitary victim of a bright-eyed hawk's swooping pounce, had come securely to a more profitable fate. Mrs M'Gurk, furthermore, had obtained remarkably good prices—as much, sometimes, as eighteenpence a couple—for them down beyond in the town, and the consequence was that, after paying her rent at Michaelmas, and buying several parcels of tea for distribution as well as for her own use, she found herself one day possessed of two shillings, which she had no immediate occasion to spend. Now it happened that she was at this time entertaining as a guest her niece's daughter, Minnie Walsh, who had been visiting some relations away over beyond Moyallen, and found her great-aunt's cabin a convenient halting-place on her journey back to her home near the town of Ballytrave. Her father's cousin, Peter M'Gonigal, had promised to pick her up in his cart, which would be passing within a mile or so of Lisconnel on its return from leaving a couple of calves over at Letterfrench; and Peter's own destination being within an easy walk of the long-car from Ardlesh to Ballytrave, Minnie's route lay smooth and clear. All the while she stayed at Lisconnel she kept on counting the days until she could set off, less from impatience to rejoin her domestic circle than because of a wonderful festival which was in prospect at Ballytrave. It would even be grander, she

had heard tell, than the ones last autumn, and everybody had said that the like of *them* nobody had ever beheld—play-acting, and dancing, and the beautiful music, with a roomful of fiddlers and pipers, and a couple of big harps that were like a fairy wind through the trees, and the songs that would make you wish you couldn't tell what, and think you were come just near to getting it somehow. And the whole of them in Gaelic, too, the very same way, people said, that they did be in the old ancient times. She wouldn't miss it for anything at all.

Minnie Walsh was generally a silent, quiet girl, but when she spoke of this *Feish*, she brightened up out of a dulness which made her enthusiasm the more striking by contrast. Its glow was caught by her hearers, and often gave a livelier turn to assemblies of the neighbours, whether on the swarded edges of the bog, basking in long, honey-coloured sunbeams, or gathered closer, on rough-hewn stools and benches, about a less distant hearth-fire. Mention of the jigs and *rinca-fadhas* would set the young folk dancing, and their elders' memories were stirred into another sort of activity, producing fragments of half-forgotten ditties, and familiar phrases long disused. For Lisconnel had hardly any Irish speakers in those days except Pat Ryan's very old mother, who so seldom said anything, that her language might indeed be a matter of conjecture. She pricked up her ears one evening upon hearing her son exchange certain guttural greetings with Joe Sheridan,

and she suddenly declaimed in her corner a long Gaelic ballad, relating the adventures of a Princess, a Giant, and an enchanted steed, which seemed but gibberish to some of her audience, and to the rest would have seemed so, only that it being a widely spread folk-tale, they were able to guide themselves through it by the clues of a word or name recognised here and there. At the end of it, Widow M'Gurk sighed profoundly with a regretful satisfaction, and said: "Sure now the sound of it does me heart good. It must be a matter of fifty year since ould Kit Maher would be singin' the very same at me poor father's house away in Asherclogher. But, bedad, if I got a sight of a one of them reels, Minnie says is to be in it, I'd consait I was a little *girsheach* again, I would so."

"And why wouldn't you come see them?" said her grand-niece. "Me mother was biddin' me many a time to be bringing you along, and me cousin Peter 'd take the two of us just as ready as one; and he could drop you here on his way back in a couple of days as handy as anythin'."

"Them two shillin's I have saved would just pay me car fare goin' and comin'," said her great-aunt, "supposin' I was fine fool enough to think of such a thing."

It was from this doubtful beginning that Mrs M'Gurk's resolve to attend the Ballytrave *Feish* sprang and rapidly matured. Everything helped it on. Minnie Walsh, desirous of company on her formidable day-long journey, coaxed and

cajoled, the neighbours athirst for even vicarious variety and excitement, encouraged and urged her, and above all her own wishes took her by the hand. It would be one while, she said to herself, before she got such another chance; you might think it had all happened on purpose. Her pitaties finished lifting, and her turf well saved, just at the time when a cart was going and coming that way, and she so far beforehand with the world that, as she reasoned, the journey wouldn't cost her a penny. So the expedition was speedily determined upon, and her plans approached the brink of accomplishment without a check.

The possibility of the whole project, however, was for the time being compressed into the shape of two current coins, those marvellous seeds from which most heterogeneous crops are raised at all seasons; and since so much hinged upon her possession of them, "Sure now Mrs M'Gurk was the very foolish woman"—as neighbours repeatedly pointed out to her—"to go put her two shillings into a pocket with a hole in it." Yet that was exactly what she did one unlucky afternoon. She had been in the act of transferring them from a little lustre jug on the dresser to an old patchwork bag, when sounds of barking and bleating made her apprehend that the Sheridans' young collie was molesting her kid, tethered on a grassy strip beside the bog stream. Whereupon she had slipped the shillings into her pocket, and ran down to the rescue. And, alas, as she was recrossing the stepping-stones, she had put her

hand into that pocket and discovered there only *one* shilling and a hole very amply large enough to account for the absence of the other. From the first it seemed a sadly hopeless case. The bit of ground on which the shilling must have been dropped was, indeed, of limited extent, not many yards square ; but the rough surface, shagged with tangled tussocks, furzes, heather clumps, and marsh greenery, mocked at the quest for a thing so small, and she had moreover passed the black mouths of two or three bog-holes, which might have irretrievably swallowed it up. Mrs M'Gurk almost despaired on the spot, though she groped wildly till she was too stiff for longer stooping. But when the news of her loss spread, there was no lack of volunteers to carry on the search. A party of them, including representatives from nearly all the half-score houses of the hamlet, were to be seen at any day-lit hour diligently employed. The children especially found it a fascinating new pastime, and, fired as much by a spirit of emulation as by several promises of a halfpenny, threw themselves into the pursuit with ardent zeal and supple joints. Yet the widow drew little or no comfort from the sight of their energy. She said they might all as well be looking for it to come tumbling down out of the stars, the way Crazy Mick was looking for his wife and childer that died on him. Her neighbours' other attempts at consolation were equally unsuccessful, Mrs Doync's being perhaps the most complete failure. A person of invariably dark forebodings,

she now suggested that if Mrs M'Gurk had gone, she might have been very apt to lose her life. Them long cars were terrible dangerous things. Or else the playhouse at Ballytrave might be going on fire, and everybody in it burning to ashes—the Lord have mercy on them. She was reading of that same happening on the paper not so long ago. And it would be a deal worse than losing a shilling, or two shillings, for that matter. Mrs M'Gurk replied that if some she could name lost all the sinse they ever had, it would make no great differ; and strode indignantly away from the group of bucket-filling women, while Judy Sheridan said apologetically: "The crathur's annoyed. Sure her heart was set on gettin' the jaunt."

The mishap had necessarily brought the whole scheme to an end. For as she no longer possessed the price of her return fare, how would she ever get home again to her cabin on the knock-awn's side, her field-fleck, her turf-stack, her few hens and her old kid—all her worldly wealth? "'Deed then, ma'am, 'twould be like slammin' a door wid the handle on the wrong side of you," Mrs Rafferty reluctantly agreed, when talking over the disaster with her. Mrs Rafferty was to have had the kid's milk during Mrs M'Gurk's absence, in return for boiling the few hens their bit of food, and the arrangement had seemed to her so advantageous that she regretted its collapse on personal grounds. But regrets, interested or otherwise, were alike futile; and now on the day but one

before she should have been starting, Mrs M'Gurk, shaking off the last twining tendril of withered hope, had gloomily faced the worst.

Having thus summarily mended her fire and snubbed her grand-niece, the Widow M'Gurk went out of doors again, in pursuit of a white chicken, which she had espied astray at a dangerous distance when she was fetching in her turf. It gave her a long and exasperating chase over the bog before it would be captured, and as she tramped back heavily with it under her shawl, she commented to herself that the only thing she wondered at was how it had contrived not to get lost on her too. The golden beams that slanted to her from a fiery scaffolding in the west dazzled her sight, and made her stumble over stocks and stones, but in her mind she beheld nothing except the eclipse of her bit of pleasure darkening with its shadow her whole horizon. Yet at this very moment Minnie Walsh, with sunshine and glee brightening her fair hair and blue eyes, was watching at the house-door for its unforeseeing mistress, whom she greeted with : "It's found, Aunt Bridget ; glory be to goodness, it's found."

"Och, don't be romancin'," Mrs M'Gurk said, while the chicken screeched in her excited grasp. "Who was it?" she shouted jubilantly as she mounted the steep little footpath.

"Ould Mr Rafferty brought it just after you goin' out," Minnie explained, as they bustled in together ; "he got it down below." And, sure enough, there on the smoke-darkened deal table

gleamed a silver shilling. Mrs M'Gurk seized it eagerly, as if grasping a friend's hand, and then—dashed it down with a rap on the table again, pressed under a wrathful thumb. "The ould liar," she said bitterly, "the ould liar," and closed a mouth whose grimness was mutely very eloquent. Minnie stared at her with a pink and white face of disappointed perplexity. "Is it lettin' on to you he was that this is me own shillin' he's after findin' yonder?" Mrs M'Gurk said, "and it wid the new pattron of the Queen on it, in the little quare crown, and 1889 on it as plain as print, when me own one's wore that thin an smooth, you'd say she hadn't a hair on her head, let alone anythin' else, and 1861 just dyin' off it. It's fools he was makin' of you and me. . . . And what's this, to goodness?" she continued, catching sight of another coin on the table, "a sixpenny bit it is—and where might that come from, if you plase?"

"Sure, Mrs Fahy it was come wid that a little while ago," Minnie said with much diffidence; "she said she was just after pickin' it up on the very same place where you lost the shillin'," and she had the notion it might ha' been two sixpennies you dropped; and says I to her I well knew it was not. But says she to me it wasn't hers anyway, and she'd lave it wid you on chance. So I couldn't forbid her."

"The schamin' thief," said Mrs M'Gurk, "and yourself was the quare *stronseach*. Just let her wait aisy till I tell her what I think of herself and her impidence and her dirty sixpennies." In the

meanwhile she relieved her feelings by hurling away the white chicken from beneath her plaid shawl, and hunting it to its roosting-place among the rafters of the inner room, whither she followed it.

Minnie stood looking out at the front door. She was cast down by the repudiation of the shilling, which had once more shattered her hopes of a travelling companion, and she perceived that her great-aunt considered her in some degree to blame for an offence whose nature she did not clearly understand. This made her view with misgivings the approach of another visitor, who now came quickly up the footpath. It was no acquaintance of hers, a tall thin girl, with a baby on her arm, and so poor-looking, even for Lisconnel, that Minnie thought her errand would be some request. But when a slender brown hand opened to disclose several dark "coppers," Minnie was not much surprised to hear: "I'm after findin' these four pennies down below, so I thought I had a right to be bringin' them up here, in case it was some of the money Mrs M'Gurk is after losin' out of her pocket."

"It is not," said Minnie, "by any manner of manes. She lost nothin' only a shillin'. You might be takin' them away, if you plase, and thank you kindly, for it's annoyed me aunt is." She tried to intercept the girl, who slipped past her and laid the money on the table. "Ah, now, don't be lavin' them there," said Minnie in a whisper, "she's inside in the room this minyit, ragin'. Or,

at all events, tell her yourself, the way she won't be blamin' me for lettin' you. For she's torminted already wid people bringin' her the wrong things. I'll call her out to you." The girl, however, said : " Ah ! not at all," and ran swiftly away.

While Minnie stood doubting whether or no to pursue her with the pennies, Mrs M'Gurk's voice came through the inner door : " What talk was that you had wid Joanna Crehan, and what brought her trapesin' up here ? "

" She's after findin'—" Minnie began to reply deprecatingly, but a peremptory injunction cut her short.

" Sling it out to her then, and bid her not trouble herself to be comin' next or nigh my place again," Mrs M'Gurk shouted, with an evident desire to be overheard.

Before Minnie could have taken any steps towards executing this delicate commission, a little gossoon bolted into the house, and the jingle of something in his hand was hardly needed to apprise her of his business. " It's entirely too bad, and so it is," she grumbled to herself, slipping out at the door. " I'll just go and sit the other side of the hill for a while, till they've done pickin' up pinnies and shillin's down below. Plase goodness it 'ill soon be too dark now to see a stim. But bedad there must ha' been a quare dale of money dropped on that one little small bit of ground. I wonder how it happened at all."

Minnie, whose imaginative powers were limited, could descry no probable explanation ; but she

pondered over it among the furze bushes, until the September dusk fell so greyly over their fairy golden lamps of blossoms that she thought she might safely venture back. When she went indoors she saw her great-aunt standing by the table, on which several additional coins seemed to have been deposited—more pennies, and, Minnie thought, another shilling; but the firelight flickered on them uncertainly, and the expression of her great-aunt's countenance was a warning notice to questioners. Mrs M'Gurk surveyed them in silence for a few moments longer, and then she swept them together with the side of her hand, more contemptuously than if they had been potato skins. "Just wait, me tight lads," she said, "and I'll larn yous to be litterin' up me house wid your ould thrash."

II

JOANNA CREHAN, the girl who had left the four pennies, returned with the baby, her youngest brother, to their dwelling, which is a bit down the road on the right hand, coming into Lisconnel from Duffclane, and was the Quigleys' before they emigrated. It stands on a flat slab of bare stone, which floors it evenly enough, and a low bank quilted with heather gives it a little shelter at the back, but it fronts the widest sweep of the bog-land just over the way. The rim of fine-textured sward is such a frequent playing and lounging

place for its tenants, that their feet wear many equally bare brown patches, which grow rapidly in size during the drier summer months, and shrink slowly all the rest of the year. They were at their largest this evening, and the little Crehans were using one of them for a game of marbles, while Mrs Crehan and her second eldest daughter sat knitting on a big boulder, and her elder son lay in its long shadow neither asleep nor awake. Joanna handed her the baby, and took from her the knitting-needles with their dangling grey woollen leg, an exchange in which she acquiesced half-contentedly, being divided between her wish to continue "Mike the crathur's" sock and to welcome "Patsy the crathur's" greeting grin. "Where was you off to wid him?" she said to Joanna. "I never seen sight of you goin'."

"I went to bring Mrs M'Gurk me fourpence towards her shillin'," said Joanna. "How many stitches had I a right to keep on me back needle?"

"Your four pinnies to Mrs M'Gurk?" said her mother, "and what in the name of fortune bewitched you to go do such a thing as that?"

"She's distracted losin' it," said Joanna, "and I'd liefer than forty fourpinnies she had it back."

"The devil's cure to the both of yous then," said Mrs Crehan, "and is that all the nature you have in you? To be slinkin' out of the house wid your pinnies to her that's nothin' to us good or bad, and your poor brother settin' off to-morra to the strange place, wid ne'er a halfpenny to put in his pocket, and yourself the only one of us that

has a brass bawbee to our names, or the dear knows it's not begrudin' him we'd be."

"And I thought you and Mike was always so wonderful great," put in Nannie Crehan, taking up the recital of her sister's delinquencies, "lettin' on you were kilt if anybody said a word agin him. And to take and give away the fourpence from him, to ould Widdy M'Gurk, that's as apt as not to throw them in your face. And I thought—"

"Did you ever by chance think that you hadn't a great dale of wit?" said Joanna; "not that you need throuble yourself to be tellin' anybody."

Mike got up and sauntered off towards a group of people at a little distance, while silence fell on his mother and sisters, who this evening lacked spirits for vivacious altercation. Joanna sat gazing blankly across the vast floor of the bog, as it lifted up against the fading fires of the west; every minute its dark rim extinguished some bright embers. She felt intensely miserable. It was the hardest grip of the unhappiness that had been pressing on her heart almost ever since the moment a few days ago when she had seen Mike set his foot on something shining silverly from under a dandelion leaf on the bog there below the knock-awn, where they all were looking for Mrs M'Gurk's lost shilling.

In obedience to his warning frown she had suppressed an ecstatic shriek, supposing that he had some plan of his own about the method of announcing his find, and she had presently seen him slip it secretly into his pocket. Never would

she have imagined that he did not intend to restore it ; but as time slipped by, this dreadful suspicion was forced upon her. For Mike made no sign, and when she asked him about it in private, at first answered evasively, but finally told her to "hould her fool's gab, and quit meddlin'." The mere possibility filled her with wrath and dismay. She had always thought so much of Mike, and she had never heard tell of anybody belonging to them behaving in such a manner. What made it worse was that Mike would be travelling off next day by himself all the way to the county Roscommon, where his uncle had got him farm work. He had never left home before, and only the strong propulsion of adverse circumstances, including a father bedridden half the year, would now have thrust him out. For Mike, long the only grown son in a flock of girls, was an important and cherished possession among the Crehans, not to be parted with lightly. Everybody agreed that none of them made such a fool of him as his eldest sister Joanna, and she had indeed taken his going sadly to heart. She had fretted much over the poverty which would oblige him to start almost penniless, as after providing him with the indispensable footgear, not a spare farthing remained in the establishment except a dwindled remnant of the shilling which Mary had earned last Easter by doing jobs for Mrs O'Neill down beyond Duffclane.

But though this had been bad enough, infinitely worse was it to think of his setting forth into the wide world laden with that guilty coin. It was

apt to bring ill-luck on him, she felt. And anyhow it was "no thing to go do," a phrase wherein she acknowledged the supremacy of that law which a more philosophical mind than hers had marvelled at under the starry heavens. Various minor ingredients helped to embitter her distress. Wounded pride and affection, disappointment, and a sense that she had been made in some degree an accomplice. Partly this last consideration, and partly a vague hope that Mike might thus be shamed into right-doing, had spurred her to the desperate step of bringing Mrs M'Gurk her fourpence. Now that the deed was done, however, she found, instead of relief, fears lest it should only confirm Mike in his felonious obduracy, or possibly draw the widow's suspicions upon him. So she sat out a disconsolate twilight, which lingered and loitered, giving her time to finish Mike's sock before she went indoors.

Mike himself had strolled on, and joined the little knot of men who were gathered at the front of Peter Ryan's house. But he scarcely changed into pleasanter company, for, "Musha, good gracious," he said to himself, "is there nothin' in creation for people to be talkin' about only that one's ould shillin'?"

"Well now, that was comical enough," Ody Rafferty was saying to Kit Ryan. "I didn't see herself at all, and I bringin' my shillin'; there was only the niece in it, but of course she would be tellin' the widdy. And then you to come landin' in a while after wid a different one, and

the same lie. You'd a right to ha' tould me what you was intindin', the way we might ha' contrived it better. But the foolishness of some folks would surprise the bastes of the field. Shankin' up to her they are wid pinnies and sixpinnies, and tellin' her they got them all on the one bit of ground. Sure an ould blind hin 'ud have more wit than to believe the likes of that. Howane'er, it's right enough, so long as she's contint to be lettin' on herself, and not callin' us all liars and thieves of the world."

"She kep' the shillin' I brought her ready enough, bedad did she," Kit said with a rueful complacency. "'Is that me shillin' you're after findin'?' says she the minyit she seen it, with the look of an ould magpie on her. 'To be sure it is, ma'am,' says I. 'What else would it be at all, unless it was another one?' says I. 'Yourself's the very cliver man entirely,' says she to me, and wid that she grabs it up. 'I'll take and lose it agin,' says she, 'the next time I want to be makin' me fortin'.' I wouldn't put it past her, mind you, to be meanin' somethin' quare. But as for findin' her own shillin' among them coarse-growin' tussocks, a body might be breakin' his back there till the Day of Judgment for any chance of it."

"Take care somebody isn't after gettin' it, all the while, and keepin' it quiet," said Ody.

"Och, I wouldn't suppose there was any person in Lisconnel would be doin' such a dirty trick on the poor ould woman," said Peter Ryan.

"She's as rich as a Jew anyway, wid half the counthryside runnin' off to her wid their savin's," said Mike. "It's well to be her, bedad." He soon sauntered on, but did not attach himself to any other party, being irked by the prevalent topic of conversation.

The next morning rose still and softly tinted, with a deep band of mist all round the far away horizon. Mrs M'Gurk got up unusually early for Sunday, and set off alone to Duffclane in time for the ten o'clock Mass, so that she got back to Lisconnel a full hour before most of her neighbours. They found her seated on a convenient flat-topped boulder by the side of the road, just at the highest point of the slight rise over which it slips down to run between the few dwellings of Lisconnel. Here the returning congregations always halt for a final gossip, before they break up, dispersing themselves into the shadowy doorways of cabins to the right and left. She descried from afar their approach along the ribbon of road, white in the afternoon sun, and singled out among the shawls and hoods and broad-brimmed black hats the heads of nearly all the neighbours whom she especially wished to interview. The Crehans, indeed, were absent, owing to Mike's imminent departure ; however, she hoped to fall in with him and Joanna by-and-by. When everybody had come up, and all were standing or sitting about, the widow rose, and began what was evidently a set speech in substance, if not in form. Her great-niece, Minnie Walsh, observed her

with some trepidation, a feeling which was more or less shared by others in her audience.

"Ody Rafferty," she said, selecting this small old man for the object of her address, "I was thinkin' just now of the way me poor grandfather would have me annoyed somewhiles, when I was a little *girsheach*, like Biddy Ryan there wid her mouth full of the red blackberries. For if ever I had e'er a pinny of an odd time, he would be biddin' me run and plant it somewheres in the bit of garden, to see would it grow into a money-plant for me. Ragin' I used to be, God forgive me, thinkin' he was only makin' a fool of me. But sure, he was right enough, poor man, and it's meself was the fool; for here I am after droppin' me shillin' on the ground there scarce a week past, and here's the half of yous coming up to me yesterday wid shillin's, and pinnies, and all manner, that ye got growin' in it. Bedad 'twas terrible quick goin' to seed—for what other way could they be there? Unless it's makin' a fool of me ye were, and that I know right well ye wouldn't have the impidence to be doin'. But 'deed now it's not keepin' the whole of the crop I'd be at all, and it not even raised on me own bit of land. So I brought your share of it along, Ody, and the other people's too"—she drew out a little grey plaid rag of shawl, and undid a knotted corner—"This is your shillin', Ody," she said. "And here's Kit Ryan's and Mrs Fahy's sixpinny." She moved from one to the other of her would-be benefactors, restoring their contribu-

tions with a firmness which obviously was not to be gainsaid. Perhaps no dramatic scene at the Ballytrave festival could well have afforded her a more enjoyable moment. Ody Rafferty alone ventured upon an audible remonstrance, "Begorrah now," he said, "if it's not a fool you are altogether, yourself's the proudest-minded, stubborn, steadfast ould divil of a headstrong ould woman from this to Cork, and maybe that comes to much the same thing, supposin' you had the wit to know it." But even he did not utter this criticism until Mrs M'Gurk was stalking away.

She wished to find Mike Crehan, whom she conjectured to be still at home, but before she reached the Crehans' house, she met him coming along the road with his red cotton travelling-bag. A troop of his younger sisters were withdrawing against their will, having been dissuaded by forcible arguments from accompanying him further. "It's follyin' me to the end of the town they'd love to be," he had said to himself. "Keenin' like a pack of ould banshees, and makin' a show of me before the lads." He would have much preferred to avoid an interview with the widow, but that seemed impossible, and he halted reluctant.

"So you're steppin' along, Mike," she said. "It's well to be the likes of you, that has the soopleness yet in your limbs. Sure now, you might tramp the whole of Ireland before you'll come on an ould man's mile, that wants the end in the middle. And look-a, Mike, here's the pinnies your sister Joanna was lavin' up at my house last night by

some manner of misapperhinsion : belike you'd ha' room for them in your pocket, and this shillin' along wid them. They're the handiest sort of luggage to be carryin' after all, if they're the hardest to get a hould on."

A mixture of motives had incited Mrs M'Gurk to bestow this gift. There was the need to be more than even with the Crehans on the score of Joanna's attempted benefaction, and the desire to get rid of a coin the possession of which did but remind her of her disappointment, while to these was added an impulse of genuine benevolence towards the tall, ragged lad—in her own mind she called him "a slip of a young bosthoon"—whom she saw faring off alone into the wide, strange world, poorly enough provided for, she presumed, though she did not surmise the depths of his people's penury. As she hurried away from him her feelings were mingled still, half-satisfied, half-regretful, and dominated by a sense that she had here definitely put off a flattering hope.

Mike's feeling, on the contrary, was quite simple, and of such unfamiliar unpleasantness that he hailed with relief the sight of his sister Joanna waiting for him at the furze gap. He would otherwise have reprobated her for protracting the hateful farewell scenes, but, as it was, he hastily thrust two shillings into her hand, saying, "Och, Hanny, run after her the quickest you can—she's just down the road—and be givin' them back to her."

Joanna looked at the shillings with eyes of

puzzled wonder. "Sure it wasn't the both of them she lost," said she. "Where at all did you get the other from?"

"Herself," said Mike. "Run like the mischief now when I bid you."

"I will that, Mike jewel," she said, and started forthwith. Delight at his act of restitution, of which she had utterly despaired, although intending to make one last appeal, superseded for the moment every other consideration; but as she caught up Mrs M'Gurk, climbing the steep footpath, she became suddenly aware that she had a confession to make, and that it might put Mike's good name at the mercy of a third person.

"Mrs M'Gurk, woman dear," she said, rushing at her perilous explanation. "Here's your shillin' Mike bid me be bringin' back to you, and thank you kindly all the same, for he couldn't be robbin' you of it, and he's got plinty of money along wid him. And the other's the one you dropped on the bog, ma'am; he and I found it a day or two back, and we just kep' it a while be way of a joke. And I hope you won't think bad of it, ma'am. Mike was biddin' me this minyit to not forgit to bring it to you."

"Saints above, it is me own one sure enough this time," said Mrs M'Gurk. "Well, now, that was the quare luck and the quare joke. And truth to tell you, Joanna Crehan, I'm thinkin' yourself had neither act nor part in it, whatever you may say." Joanna's face corroborated this conjecture so disconcertedly that Mrs M'Gurk

hastened to add : "But after all there's no harm in a joke. Like enough I might take the notion in me head to have a bit of a one meself. Suppose I was to be lettin' on to the rest of them I had the shillin' lyin' in the corner of me pocket all the while, and niver seen it, nobody could tell but that was the way it happint, and 'twouldn't be too bad a joke at all."

"'Twould be the greatest joke ever was, and yourself's the rael dacint woman for that same," Joanna declared with an enthusiasm which said little for her sense either of morals or of humour.

Then they went their several ways. As the widow opened her door, all her eager plans for the morrow were in brisk motion again, like clockwork freed from some hampering hitch. Joanna, running homeward, felt conscious of nothing except the happiness of knowing Mike to be safely quit of the crime with which she had feared that he would burden himself irretrievably. She found her mother and sisters looking out from a knoll whence the last glimpse was to be had of the dwindling road-ribbon along which Mike would presently pass from sight. Mrs Crehan was lamenting over the poor circumstances of her departing son. "The crathur," she said, "trampin' away wid himself into the width of the world, and ne'er a pinny to his name, any more than if he was a baste drivin' to a fair. Not a shillin' in his pocket has he."

"He has not," Joanna said, and added indiscreetly, "Glory be to God."

THE HIGH TIDE AND THE MAN- TRAPPERS

I

ALL Abbey Dowling's neighbours thought she was the very foolish woman to let her good-for-nothing father-in-law establish himself in her house again after his return from America, and many of them told her so frankly, but fruitlessly. This was not surprising, as everybody agreed that the Dowlings were always as headstrong as mules. Everybody agreed, too, that her poor husband's people were none of them worth much, and that this old Patrick Mulrane, though not without some companionable qualities, was worth as little as any. Drinking and raising rows had hitherto been his constant occupation, and the whole parish of Clochranbeg knew what lives he had led his son and daughter-in-law, until, upon the death of the former, off he had gone to the States, whence nothing had been heard of him for the next dozen years and more, while the young widow was struggling to keep herself and her three sons, and her invalid sister, on their stony little bit of land. "So now, when the boys are

grown big, and able to be workin', back he flourishes wid the notion he'll have them supportin' him in idleness, and he after lavin' all of yous to starve, for any thanks it was to him. Raison you'll have to repint it, if you take him in. Fightin' wid the lads he'll be, and frightenin' poor Maggie there, and drinkin' their earnin's on you, besides learnin' them all manner of villiny—that's every hand's turn he'll be doin' for you, ma'am, mark my words!" Her old and respected friend, Mrs O'Hagan, tramped down a long and rough way to exhort her thus. But the words might just as well have been spoken to the sea-gulls skirling about Mrs Mulrane's door.

If her neighbours' remonstrances had any effect at all, it was merely to make her the more proudly careful that they should seem uncalled for; and the remoteness of her dwelling, out of the way on the shingly strand, helped her to keep up appearances. Yet she was not so successful but that some signs and many rumours of domestic troubles were soon in existence. Undoubtedly old Mulrane himself was often to be seen in various public-houses, drinking and brawling; his grandsons looked ragged and poverty-stricken, even when they were known to have sold a couple of beasts advantageously, or to have done not too badly at the mackerel fishing; and their mother's aged and harassed aspect, her beggarly attire, and her miserable marketing, became the veriest commonplaces of local gossip. As for

reports of the old man's violence and intemperance, of screeches and roars heard in the vicinity of the Mulranes' house, and of raging warfare and patched-up truces within it, they were rife incessantly.

Things had been going on thus, if not quite so ill as some people declared, yet certainly quite ill enough, for six or seven years, when one autumn afternoon the three young Mulranes were away on the shore gathering sea-wrack. It had been washed up by a heavy ground-swell in great rolls all along the shingle reef which spans a gap in the cliff wall, making a rough causeway, for at the end of it next to the Mulranes' cabin sea-water rushes under a natural rock arch to fill a small, land-locked basin, never empty even at the lowest ebb. To-day a spring tide was flowing, and nearly at its height ; in fact the boys had for some time been expecting every minute to see it turn ; but the band of foam kept on seething further and further up, and their last bundles were lifted frothy and dripping. They were heaping the dark weed on a little low plateau, covered with rough, tussocky sward, which just there sinks down to the water's edge, in steep continuation of the pasture land cresting the cliffs ; and red Paddy had remarked to his black brothers, Art and Dan, that he thought they had nearly a boat-load in it now, when a woman came rushing straight down the grassy slope. To judge by the silvering of her rough hair, and the intricacy of her wrinkles, she was an old woman, but she

moved with youthful agility and vigour as she abruptly set about shovelling up the weed, carrying and piling it, all in silent, breathless haste.

"You've no call to be killin' yourself, mother," Paddy said presently. "We've got our plenty gathered, or very nigh. What kep' you till now?"

"Nothin' at all kep' me," said Mrs Mulrane, "good or bad."

"She had to come round along by the high path," said Art. "It's drowned she'd be if she was down under the cliffs." Seldom does it happen that one could not get thither dry-shod, over the shingle and boulders at their base, from the cabin some quarter of a mile away. But that short-cut was clearly impossible now, as waves were tumbling at a height which did not leave footing for a goat. "Quare full tides there are in it to-day," said Art.

"Turnin' it is the now, anyway," said Paddy. "And we might better be loadin' up, or else we'll be bothered pushin' off th' ould boat. It's runnin' out of the channel there this last five minyits."

"Ah hould your gab talkin'," said Mrs Mulrane angrily, panting as she shook down a dank armful. "We've a right to get a good bit more while we're at it, and where's the hurry to be goin' back there this long while yet?" She turned away with a flounce, while her sons' three heads nodded together in recognition of her crossness, for

which they thought they could account as usual.

But at the same moment a creaking of oars was heard, and a small boat darted into sight from behind a screening rock. As soon as the two men who were rowing her saw the Mulranes, they made for the shore, shouting loudly all the way, but the lads were prevented from listening by their mother's behaviour. For she instantly sprang to them, and caught hold of Art and Paddy, hooking one arm through Dan's, so as to include him in the group, and dragging them all as closely together as possible, while she adjured them in a desperate whisper: "Boys—boys dear—let me tell yous first—it's after findin' him they are, and they're come bawlin' it to us—bad luck to them. For the love of God, don't be lettin' on I wasn't tellin' yous before. Ay, it's your grandfather's drowned on the strand up at our place. He come in a while after yous goin' out, and was grabbin' at poor Maggie's bit of baker's bread I had in it, put away for her on the dresser, and when I bid him let it be, he made at me wid the knife—troth did he—and swore he'd have me in littler bits than the bread; mad drunk he was. So out I run, thinkin' I'd aisy get away from him, and he took out follyin' me, and very prisently down he come wid his foot caught fast between two big stones; ne'er a hit there was on him, only he could'nt wranch it out, and he all the while cursin' cruel.

"So says I to meself he might better be stoppin'

where he was for a bit, till he got a trifle sinsible, the way he wouldn't be doin' murder on Maggie and me, and 'twould be soon enough for yous to let him up when ye come in to the supper. For there wasn't a sign of the say next or nigh him then—I swear it. But by-and-by I noticed the unnatural height it was risin', and I thought belike I had a right to be callin' yous to him, for ne'er an offer could I make by meself to be liftin' the weight of him or the stones; and I legged it the quickest I could up behind the house to look was yous on the point here yet; and 'twas then I seen the big waves rollin' widin a couple of leps of him.

“But says I to meself, they'll be over him wild agin the lads could git round to him, and God knows the whole of them might be swep' away into the deep say, and they tryin' to raich him. And it's foolish-like I got wid the fright, for I hadn't the heart in me to be stayin' or goin', and I run this way and that way up there in distraction, till I was sartin-sure I might as well hould me whist till doom's day. So down I come to yous, and I niver said a word. But these Behans are apt to be seein' me and him below on the strand; for, now that I remimber, they were fishin' about all day. And if ye let on I niver tould yous, they'll say I left him drowndin' a purpose—”

“You did so, bedad,” said Dan, drawing his arm out of hers.

“And the best thing maybe could happen us,”

said Art, pressing into his place. Paddy stood passively, as if dumfounded.

Time failed for further opinions, as the Behans' boat was already bumping on the shelving, grassy ledges, and Larry Behan's voice over-bore every other.

"Och, Mrs Mulrane, it's too late you are now entirely; drowned dead he is, poor ould Paddy. Ne'er a spark of life was left in him by the time we come, and he lyin' in scarce twelve inches of water; but great work we had gettin' the foot of him free of the stones, that had him gripped like a rabbit in a trap. Sure we seen him wid you on the strand a while ago, for lurkin' up and down the bay we are since mornin', and some roars we heard, but we'd no notion anythin' was amiss. And when we seen you above on the cliff path, we knew 'twas here you'd be goin' to, 'cause we noticed your sons workin'. But next time we drew in shore a bit, we heard him shoutin' woeful, so we pulled up, and near swamped we were among the heavy rollers; and over him they were, and had the breath choked out of him, before we found him, by the one arm crooked up above his head. So we left Johnny Rooney wid him, and come along straightways to tell you—stone dead he is. There's no use hurryin' now. But, och to goodness, ma'am, it's the very-little-good-for pack them lads of yours are, that you couldn't get them persuaded at all to thry save their poor ould grandfather, while there was a chance. Afraid of the rough water they were,

belike, and waitin' for the turn of the tide—and lavin' him there fast by the leg—the cowardly young man-trappers."

"For pity's sake whist," interrupted their mother. It was not clear to which party she appealed; but her sons stood in silence, looking down, as if a wave were actually passing over their heads.

And it was thus that they got the name by which they were to be known for many a long day in Meenaclochran.

II

EVEN before her favourite son Dan went off to the States on her, some of Mrs Mulrane's neighbours had been thinking her partly *quare* in her head, and after that they thought so all the more, for it wasn't natural, they said, for any reasonable body to go about the way she did, with ne'er a word out of her, looking fit to *swally* any folks she met, whether they spoke to her or let her alone. This new misfortune did not befall her until three or four years had passed since the tragical end of her father-in-law; and dismal years they were for all the household in her cabin on the strand. Never a happy one at the best of times, a heavier cloud seemed to have settled down upon it, darkening the days for everybody, except perhaps helpless Maggie Dowling, from whose life a recurring violent terror had vanished

with the departure of old Patrick. "Not but what the poor man was dacint and good-natured enough, so long as he hadn't the drink taken," she said.

Like her sister, Mrs Mulrane, of course, found things quieter, but that was for her a questionable benefit, because it gave her the more leisure for thinking, and her thoughts were poisoned with bitter self-reproaches. As time crept on, these might have been mitigated, if they had sprung only from the manner of old Patrick's death. She might have argued them down in her own mind with a theory, more or less well founded, that her share in the event was at worst merely an error of judgment, if indeed an error at all; and having thus convinced herself, she would not have deeply considered the neighbours' view of her proceedings, however unfavourable. But as it was, the panic-stricken impulse, which had led her to cast upon her sons the responsibility for that fatal delay, had in every way worsened her plight. For in addition to the dubious guilt of her hesitation to rescue, she had burdened her conscience with the indisputably criminal act of bearing false witness against her nearest and dearest. That it was also an act of utter folly she speedily learned by the experience which so punctually arrives just too late. By allowing her sons to be accused she had more than trebled her own share of affronts and mortifications; she had opened a threefold inlet to the spears and arrows of disparaging looks

and speeches, that flew around her thick and fast.

Old Patrick Mulrane had been one of those people who, though generally disapproved of, are not personally unpopular, and this made everybody feel all the more strongly about the dolefulness of his fate, and the worthlessness of those who had so disgracefully forborne any endeavours to avert it. A tall, gaunt Debby Ashe, who spoke with some authority, declared that it "put her heart across" to think of the poor old man lying there, caught by the leg in the cruel big boulder-stones, and watching the waves rolling in every minute to drown the life out of him, and those three great lumps of grandsons of his all the while standing within a goat's tether of him, that wouldn't so much as reach a hand to help him, not though their unfortunate mother went down on her two knees to them—there was that to be said for her. No indeed, not a one of the whole of them would, for fear the water might take them off their good-for-nothing feet. She wouldn't have thought there were the likes of three such young poltroons in the parish, and they were no credit to it, or to whoever had the rearing of them. Many other persons shared Debby Ashe's opinion, and expressed it in still stronger terms, which whoever had the rearing of these young poltroons often overheard, sometimes by accident, but more times by design. Often again she saw, or fancied that she saw, the shadow of such comments on the downcast countenances of her sons, which were usually

gloomy enough to give her ample scope for conjectures of the kind. Amongst these was predominant a fear that the lads were "thinking bad of her," grudging and resenting the ill-turn she had done them. Reasonable as the apprehension might seem, there were little grounds or none for it, except in the case of Dan, her favourite, and even he said never a word. In fact the whole household kept an absolute silence upon the subject.

It would be impossible to ascertain exactly how she at length became aware that Dan was thinking of the Jim M'Evoys' eldest daughter Rose, and that she wouldn't have anything to say to him, and that, supposing the girl would itself, her people wouldn't let her, by reason of the talk about him and his brothers at the time their grandfather got his death, and the bad name it gave them among the neighbours. Perhaps Maggie, the onlooker, may have dropped a hint and supplied her with the key which enabled her to spell out from a cipher of trifles how the matter stood. At any rate it came to her knowledge, and brought keenlier home to her what a dire injury she had done Dan and his brethren. For at this time there was nothing else in the Mulrane's circumstances to make him a despicable suitor for Rose M'Evoy. Since their grandfather had ceased to squander their earnings, they had thriven fairly well on their bit of land, where Mrs Mulrane herself worked desperately, and at sea, to which they now put out in a fishing-boat of their own. They

sometimes did so in "soft" or "dirty" weather, which daunted their neighbours, whose commentary on such an occasion often ran to the effect that, "Them young Mulranes was mighty ready to be foolin' off wid themselves in a gale of win', when they thought they had a chance of grabbin' a few mackerl. They were a dale more delicate if there was no talk of gettin' anythin' better out of the water than a misfortunate ould drowndin' crathur. Bedad it looked very like as if they'd liefer he stopped where he was that time, and let them be shut of him. Or maybe what made them so hardy now was thinkin' it wouldn't be wid *drowndin'* the likes of them were apt to get their deaths, no matter where they took it into their heads to streel off to. But sure it was a pity for ould Paddy that they didn't take up wid the notion of bein' so venturesome a bit sooner, ay was it—the young poltroons."

Consequently Mrs Mulrane could not but clearly understand what was implied by the M'Evoy's rejection of her son, and in her raging against it she had to include herself. She brooded and fretted over it for several weeks, till one gusty March morning, when the sight of Dan's haggard face at breakfast had sharpened her two most goading fears, which were that he might make away with himself, or else run off to the States, she formed a difficult resolve, and started up the cliff path to call on Rose M'Evoy's grandmother.

The Dowlings and the O'Hagans were friends of very long standing, while Mrs O'Hagan, a

somewhat older contemporary, had known her all the days of her life, and was now rather poorer than herself, facts which made her errand less impossibly humiliating. Still, it needed a mighty effort, for she was inwardly furious at the M'Evoy's impudence. "Cock up the likes of them to look crooked at Dan," and sorely perplexed to imagine how she could set about effecting her purpose without compromising the pride of the Dowlings and the Mulranes. Her own, individually, she was prepared to let fall. For a task of the kind her qualifications were but meagre, tact, patience and self-control being by no means her strong points, and even the stubborn will with which she was commonly credited seeming nothing more serviceable than a habit of adhering blindly to any position she might have hurriedly taken up in some access of fear or anger. So now in her interview with Mrs O'Hagan, instead of approaching its delicate object gradually yet steadily, as a skilful diplomatist would have done, she proceeded in a series of abrupt advances and awkward retreats, certain to draw upon her the very suspicions that she wished to shun. That she notwithstanding did never blunder or venture very near to the matter in hand will appear, however, from the part of their conversation which most directly referred to it.

"'Deed now, I often heard an ould woman I knew passin' the remark," Mrs Mulrane said, *apropos* of a reported marriage, "that her sons were well off to have ne'er a sister, the way there

was no need to be savin' up for their linen chests, and bits of fortunes, and sellin' stock for them, or givin' it away off the land. It's a great burden girls do be in a family, ma'am, all the one thing wid the rates and the rint."

"That's a bad word you're sayin' agin yourself and meself, a while back, ma'am," Mrs O'Hagan said, with a tinge of severity in her jesting tone.

"Sorra the daughter I ever had, glory be," Mrs Mulrane said, obtusely missing the point in her preoccupation with her own moral, "and ne'er a drawback me lads have at home, unless their poor aunt, that's not apt to last much longer, and that's no great trouble or expinse at all. She has a couple of pounds hid away somewhere this ten or twelve year towards her buryin', I well know, though it's not grudgin' her I've a call to be, nor the lads wouldn't either, if she hadn't a pinny to her name. We can afford to be keepin' her. To be sure, you had a daughter to marry, ma'am, and she has a good few *girsheachs* growin' up, and two or three of them red-headed ; I do be noticin' them on a Sunday. But Rose is a fine slip of a girl. I suppose they'll be settlin' her wid somebody agin next Shrove, ma'am, anyway?"

"Och, they're in no hurry," said Mrs O'Hagan. "Did you happen to hear tell what way the Widdy Hefferman's sick heifer was this morning?"

"I did not. She and I aren't very great. But as for the hurry, that's the very thing I do be sayin' to Dan and his brothers at home. Sorra a

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bit of a hurry there is on me to be seein' a daughter-in-law comin' in ; but, all the same, ne'er a word I'd say against it, supposin' a one of them took the notion in his head. And if by any chance it was a girl out of his own parish belongin' to very respectable people, that he thought of makin' up a match wid, all the better I'd be plased."

"Me daughter wouldn't be wishful to marry a girl of hers wid any people livin' down along the strand, that I know," Mrs O'Hagan said hastily and flurriedly, as if running out from beneath a dangerous roof, "she'd liefer they went to some place inland. People don't be gettin' their health so well, she says, livin' on the edge of the cowl'd water."

"There's more than a few wouldn't get their healths to suit them, unless they could be takin' away other people's characters, and puttin' an ill name on a poor boy that never done them a hand's turn of harm," Mrs Mulrane burst out with bitter emphasis, this obvious evasion inciting her to one of her indiscreet rushes forward ; but she pulled herself up with a jerk. "I was thinkin' of somethin' I read on the paper a while ago," she explained, "about a couple of childer got burnt to death in a house, I disremimber where. But the crathurs might ha' been took out safe enough, for there was them close by that would ha' gone through fire and water to raich them wid ne'er a thought of drowndin' or anythin' else, only nobody seen the house was a-fire, barrin' a silly,

dotin' ould body, no better than meself, ma'am, and she never had the wit to tell the other people till it was too late altogether. So anythin' that happint was no fau't of theirs, ma'am, whatever talk there might be afterwards."

"Goodness pity us all," said Mrs O'Hagan, "And was that the story she had? Sure now, it's the quare woman that wouldn't be makin' up lies to rightify her own belongings, if she got the chance; and it's the quare ignorant people that would be blamin' the crathur for it. Not that you or me, Abbey, has any call to be considherin' any such a thing. And it's like enough your son 'ill be bringin' home a wife before any great while. Would he be apt to think of gettin's married up in Dublin? Nannie Dwyer was tellin' me her sister's son was intindin' he would, because they have the name of ownin' pigs, so it's a heavy fee Father Hely'nd have to be gettin' off them. They'd do it a dale chaper in Dublin."

"As much as to say he'd better go look for a girl in a strange place, where they know naught about him," Mrs Mulrane said, whirling on her brown shawl, and again her hostess protested: "Musha, not at all, not at all. What 'ud ail anybody to be takin' up that notion? And sure it's not runnin' away wid yourself you are yet a while? Stop now, woman dear, till I get you a sup of thick milk."

Nevertheless Mrs Mulrane was very soon running away with herself down the steep cliff path, against the bleak March wind; and as she

went she realised more fully than she had ever done before the irrevocability of her false step. The druidical mist of untruth which she had raised could not now be dispersed by any spell in her power ; confession was of no avail. She had indeed robbed her sons of a jewel, and not only so, but had herself hopelessly lost it ; she could never restore it to them again.

And a few weeks later Dan Mulrane was voyaging, a forlorn and listless passenger, in a big liner, across the lonely ocean-plains between Liverpool and Boston. He had departed unbeknownst, wishing to shun a domestic scene of lamentation and remonstrance. Beyond that circle he had no need to apprehend any excessive regrets, for though naturally of a sociable disposition, he had not a single friend. The sentiment of the parish was that " It would be a good job if the other two had went along wid him " ; and his mother's grief was embittered by the reflection that " when the Daly's two brats of boys set off to New York a convoy as big as a fair saw them as far as Loughard ; but her poor Dan might travel away to the well of the World's End, and no more talk about it than if he was an ould stray saygull."





THE FOOT-STICKS OF SLUGHNA- TRAIGH

I

THE strange childer must have come to Clochranbeg a good while before young Dan Mulrane the man-trapper's emigration, for at that time they were quite settled in the place. That is to say, they were so in fact, though by a sort of convention it was always assumed that they were only temporary sojourners. Upon their first arrival this had promised to be really the case, as the elderly vagrant with whom they were travelling intended to pass but one night in the village, and did actually make an even shorter stay there, for the people who tried to awaken him next morning found that he had set off again some hours earlier. Whence he had come seemed, to Clochranbeg, a more unanswerable question than whither he had gone, nor could the small girl and smaller boy, who were left behind, throw much light upon his past. Their recollections, which might be supposed to reach back a couple of years or so, were of nothing except tramping about with "Himself,"

otherwise "the man," and they could give no account either of their relationship to him or to each other, or of how he had become their guardian. They called one another "Min" and "Atty," which was all they knew about names; so that there were not enough to go round the three of them, as Mr Heany the schoolmaster remarked in the course of a discussion about funeral arrangements.

It was lucky that nobody's feelings would be hurt by this stranger's coming on the rates, for burial at the expense of the Union seemed inevitably to await him. But there was a general opinion that he should not be allowed to go to the pauper's corner of Kilanure burying-ground unprovided with at least a name; and it appeared as if that much could easily be done for him by a simple invention, until Dermot Cassidy, who had a turn for raising difficulties, started a question about the impropriety of "as good as puttin' a lie in the poor man's mouth, and he on the way to his grave." For it was fifty chances to one, Dermot argued, against their guessing a name for him that would be even an offer at his own. It might, for anything they knew, said Dermot, be cast up to the *crathur* where he was going. This speculation appealed to fears and fantasies that were always rife among Dermot's hearers, and it was a relief when the schoolmaster recommended what could be approved of as a safe and blameless step by those who felt most strongly that you cannot take too many pre-

cautions when dealing with matters of such mysterious moment.

"It's liker than not," Mr Heany said, "that he had the one Christian name with the little gossoon, if he was the grandfather, as the chances are. And if you add to that just 'Mann'—I seen the name now and again meself, spelt with the two n's—you'll be saying no more of him than you might of any mother's son of us all. 'A Mann' or 'Art Mann'—no fear but that's a right guess anyway."

This suggestion being accepted in all seriousness, and an inquest being deemed unnecessary, the death of A. Mann was officially registered, while the surname became less formally a property of that forlorn little pair, who were thenceforth known collectively as "the strange childer," but individually as Min and Atty Mann.

Since their late guardian had transmitted to them nothing else except a walking-stick, and a red cotton bundle, containing a few rags, some crusts, and fourpence-halfpenny in coppers, it seemed evident that the workhouse would have to provide for them also; and the Relieving Officer's deputy did, in fact, propose to convey them thither in the old man's hearse. But Mrs O'Hagan, with whom they were meanwhile lodging, so vehemently protested against the unluckiness of such a plan, and was so strongly backed up by all her cronies, that he agreed to leave them where they were until the next time he had business in the neighbourhood. And

when before long this did happen, he was met on her very threshold by Mrs O'Hagan with a flat refusal to hand him over Atty and Min. She gave him impudence, he said, and asked if himself wasn't the sensible man to be thinking to take children driving ten or a dozen miles in a draughty ould covered van, and they choking with the whooping-cough that mortal minute. Faix then, he might catch them himself, if he wanted to, she couldn't tell where they were playing outside down along the road. Whereupon Mrs Daly next door had poked out her head, and peremptorily troubled him not to be drawing up his ould workhouse yoke in front of *her* place. Poor Alec Hanlon reported these affronts with not a little resentment, but without obtaining much redress from the authorities. The truth was that they were by no means eager to make themselves responsible for the support of the derelict children, and were more than willing to be relieved of it by anybody else. So they instructed him to leave the woman alone; if she had a fancy to keep the children, well and good; she'd be sure to let them know plenty soon enough whenever she got tired of it; trust her for that. It was perhaps a rather unofficial and irregular line of action, but it satisfied all the persons concerned, except Alec Hanlon, who could have wished to be charged with some alarming reprimand for the over-awing of *impident* Mrs O'Hagan and abusive Mrs Daly.

The strange childer themselves acquiesced in

their new situation quite contentedly. They continued to lodge with Mrs O'Hagan, who, living her lone, had room to spare, and they boarded dispersedly among the neighbours, who never failed to produce at least a sufficiency of potatoes. It could not be said that either of them did credit to their ungrudged fare, as they both remained thin and peaky-faced. In appearance they resembled one another, though Min's hair was dark chestnut and Art's a brownish hay-colour, and though the sun that had tanned his face had sprinkled hers with constellations of freckles of the first magnitude. In disposition there was less likeness, yet more than showed on the surface, the difference between them lying in development rather than in character. It was, however, noticed that two peculiarities were equally shared by each of them. Both feared horribly policemen and all kinds of officials, and both were most reluctant to set foot anywhere except along the road. Evidently the main precepts of their moral law had been : *Thou shalt keep out of the way of the pólis*, and *Thou shalt not stravade about* ; while its sanctions had comprised shutting up in gaols and workhouses, and getting lost and starved. Several weeks passed after their arrival before the little Clochranbegians could persuade them to venture out upon the bog, and for many a day did Min and Atty cast dismayed and mistrustful glances at good-natured Andy M'Evoy, who happened to be wearing an old postman's cap. Although, as time went on, familiarity and the force of example

undermined the authority of these fears, they never wholly lost their influence.

It was furthermore discovered that the strange childer were both endowed with the gift of song, possessing voices unexpectedly powerful for persons of their age and growth. Min, whose years were estimated at six or seven, had obviously formed her style upon that of various street-singers, and in a high treble reproduced the quavers and flourishes with more exactness, happily, than the words of their ditties, which in her version had at least the grace of complete unintelligibility. Atty, her junior by some twelve-month, owned the clear pipe of a blackbird, and appeared to be an improviser into the bargain, the stock piece in his repertoire showing all the signs of an original composition. A simple and artless lay enough, it became exceedingly popular at Clochranbeg, and was so repeatedly demanded by audiences of both young and old that its strains might often be heard rising from some out-of-door playground in the daytime, and after dark from some flickering fireside.

*"I would I were a mountain pig,
I would indeed bedad;"*

it ran to a monotonous, mournful sort of chant,

*"I would I were a mountain pig
A-walking in the lane;"*

and it continued thus indefinitely, varying only

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with respect to the occupation of the mountain pig. Perhaps the very monotony of its music may have been found soothing, or possibly the charm lay in the perfect senselessness of the words ; undoubtedly it somehow hit the fancy of the neighbours, and it is probably chanted to this day upon the bog-lands of Meenaclochran.

One summer morning, when they had been a couple of months in the place, Min and Atty wandered down towards the beach with a number of other children, and near the end of a sandy breen halted in a convenient hollow, where Atty was called upon for his song. Seated under a gold-flecked furze bush, he was chanting to a well-satisfied audience, when a young fisherman came along up from the shore, and paused to listen. He had a dark melancholy face, which did not look at all amused, though he presently remarked : "That's a comical lilt you have, sonny, entirely." His voice sounded gruff, and, as it were, rusty, but in no way menacing, yet several of the children immediately in warning tones bade Atty "whist," while the eldest girl pulled him up by the hand, and rushed off with him out of sight among the banks and bushes, all the others stampeding after her. Little Tim Nolan, looking back as they scampered, and seeing that the young man had turned away, threw a small pebble slightly in his direction, as if to symbolise their sentiments.

"Who was yon thin?" said Min. "Has he anythin' to say to the pólis?"

"Sure not at all," she was informed. "Pat

Mulrane he is, one of the man-trappers, that's livin' down below on the strand round the corner there, along wid th' ould mother of them. Quare and cruel bad they are. One time they took and drowned the ould grandfather they had, in a big black hole in the middle of Slughnatraigh, and they'd be apt to do the same on anybody they got scramblin' about the rocks near their house. You'd a right to keep out of it."

The warning impressed Min and Atty all the more because it came from contemporaries of their own, and thenceforward to their list of perils to be avoided were added the man-trappers, and the man-trappers' home.

Before very long, Atty's mind began to be harassed by yet another anxiety, and this was the conduct of Min. Ever since Min could remember she had walked literally in a prescribed track, from which she dared not deviate, controlled by a will not to be, even in imagination, gainsaid. And now that she found herself in a state of unprecedented freedom, her long-repressed energies tended to run riot. Within the limits imposed by her abiding fear of getting locked up, on the one hand, and lost, on the other, she waxed rather wild and venturesome. Foolhardy she appeared to Atty, whose spirits, less elastic, had not rebounded as vigorously as hers, and whose further-seeing mind foreboded evil from her exploits. Often did he watch her proceedings with scared and scandalised eyes, and often did she turn a deaf ear to a low whisper admonishing

her : "They'll put us out of it, Min, if you do be going' on that-a way." Many a time, as he gave by request a recital of his *Mountain Pig*, his thoughts were all the while full of apprehensions about the pranks which he surmised her to be playing, and the calamitous consequences which they might entail. As things turned out, he might have seemed entitled to say : "Wasn't I after tellin' you?" Yet it may be doubted whether Min's misdeeds had in reality much to do with the event. Her habit of hunting the neighbours' poultry, and of "rising rows" among their children, did, it is true, cause some annoyance, but would hardly have produced such an effect unaided by other circumstances.

These other circumstances, however, arose a year or so after the arrival of Min and Atty. A spell of exceptionally hard times set in at Meenaclochran. Disastrous weather on land and sea, wreck of crops, failure of fishing, took heavy toll from lives that had no superfluities to renounce. The cheapest of yellow meal began to be reckoned a luxury ; nay, at last there was a demand outrunning the supply even for the savourless "salt leaves," gathered off the rocks to be boiled into the sorriest pretence of a dinner. Everybody was pinched, and nobody could tell how long the trouble might continue, since the wisest person knew hardly more than little Jim Daly, who drummed on his soon-empty saucer in vain desire for a re-fill, or old Bridey Ahern, who said hopefully : "Plase goodness there might be

a pitaty in it to-morra," to console herself over her dismal sea-weedy repast.

And when matters were at the worst, nothing would suit Miss Mann but she must needs go meddle with Mrs O'Hagan's hens and the Fottrells' goat. She had incited a number of the children to join with her in building a very elaborate sand-house under a bent-matted bank on the north strand, which was all well and good, keeping them quite harmlessly employed. But her proceedings ceased to wear this blameless aspect one unlucky afternoon when, in the absence of her older comrades at school, she took it into her head that the new structure would make a grand shed for live stock. Whereupon she had captured Mrs O'Hagan's four best hens, and the Fottrells' grey goat, and conveying them severally to the sand-house, had stuffed into it the whole reluctant party. Grave results ensued, for in struggling to get free Nannie broke through the crumbling roof, which dropped in heavy lumps upon the hens, killing one of them outright, and giving the others a shock which they "weren't the better of to their last day," while the terrified goat rushed away, and was lost on the bog for the best part of a week, during which the little Fottrells had to forego their drop of milk, a very serious privation.

Certainly this piece of mischief happened most inopportunately, at a time when, as Mrs Fottrell next morning observed, "It would be hard enough to find feedin' for an extry chucken, let alone a

couple of growin' childer. And they destroyin' all before them," she added severely. She was talking in the kitchen of Mrs O'Hagan, the strange childer's especial patroness, having called upon her early to report the continued disappearance of Nannie the goat.

"'Deed yes, ma'am," Mrs O'Hagan replied, "I'm thinkin' this while back we maybe had a right to let them two go into the House. 'Twould be better for the crathurs after all than runnin' wild here, and comin' short as like as not. They'd be kep' under rules there, anyway, but it's too ould I am meself for trapesin' after them to hinder them of doin' mischief on other people, that aren't well able to afford to be at the loss of anythin' at all."

"Bedad they are not, ma'am," Mrs Fottrell said very promptly. "Clochranbeg does be a poor place these times. Most whiles there'd be no need for grudgin' the likes of them their bit of food among the whole of us. But the Union van's to be at Dunskeagh to-morra, and Himself's goin' over to Ballylough this evenin', and could lave word wid them to send it on here, and pick up the strange childer on the way back."

"I wouldn't say but it might be the best plan," Mrs O'Hagan said doubtfully.

"Then that's what I'll do," Mrs Fottrell said with decision. "Bad luck to it, I wonder where they're after hurooshin' the misfortunate goat to—she's a terrible loss."

Now this conversation was overheard by Min and Atty, hidden behind a turf creel in the corner,

whither they had guiltily fled upon Mrs Fottrell's entrance; and horror-stricken eavesdroppers they were. In fact Min seemed to Atty so nearly on the point of betraying them by breaking forth into loud lamentations, that he dragged her out unseen through the back door; and then they both ran wildly until they reached the border of the widest bog.

"Don't you be stoppin'," Min said, tugging Atty on in her turn. "It's away we must get the furthest ever we can contrive, before they come after us wid their dirty ould van."

"Where are we goin' to?" said Atty.

"Och, how should I know? anywheres at all," said Min.

"It's starved and lost we'll be," said Atty, hanging back, and looking distrustfully over the lonely black land, that swept out a great circle, rounded off far away among the dim-white November mists.

"If we are itself, I'd liefer get lost than to be shut up in the hijjis ould House all the days of our lives' ends," said Min.

"I wisht to goodness, then, you didn't take and fryken th' ould goat on them," Atty said querulously. "That's the raison why she's so mad, and they're puttin' us out of it," and he sat down under a clump of broom, looking as if he intended to stay there.

"I wisht I was drowned in the middle of a bog-hole," Min said with sudden desperation, which caused Atty to clutch her frantically crying :

"Och, Min, honey, never mind. What's to become of us at all?"

"Maybe we might find th' ould goat some time," Min suggested with a reactionary gleam of hope. "And then they'd be apt to let us stop. 'Twas that they thought so bad of; worsen a dale than Mrs O'Hagan's hin. We'd have a great chance if we found her."

"Let's go look," said Atty, jumping up. "Och, Min, I declare to goodness there she is just over yonder."

"It's the moral of herself bedad," Min said joyfully, and they both hied off across the bog towards a boulder glimmering greyly among some rushy tussocks.

II

BEFORE noon on the following day the two children had come considerably nearer the fulfilment of Atty's prediction that they might be lost and starved. Lost, in truth, they were very thoroughly, for their quest of the Fottrells' goat had lured them with many false hopes so far over the bog that they no longer knew in what direction Clochranbeg lay; and a fast of four-and-twenty hours feels unpleasantly like starvation to people of seven or eight. In the lonesome track through which they were straying they had met neither man nor beast, and after a night spent huddled in misery under a furzy bank, they had been since

the return of light wandering on, growing hungrier, colder, and more terrified with the lapse of each endless hour. The Union van, loaded with constables, would have appeared to them a blessed ark of safety. But now, when mid-day was still distant, they had espied before them, not far off, the pale twinkling of the sea, and they made towards it, rejoicing at the sight of any familiar object.

On the edge of the cliff they were once more disappointed, because no houses came into view ; still, there was an easy slope leading down to the beach, and it would be a relief to escape from the dreadful desert that stretched behind them. If they had but known, they were at that moment standing on the brink of a grimmer peril than famine, captivity, or any other of the harms that threatened them ; for there at their feet lay spread Slughnatraigh.

The bit of the strand so-called does not outwardly show much to account for its very evil repute all about Meenaclochran. It is a little semi-oval of a bay, curved round by cliffs with swarded crests. Midway in their curve a spur of the cliff shelves down to the strand, jutting out seaward in a low rocky ridge, overgrown with a curious entanglement of seaweed, woodbine and brier bushes. The highest tides seldom reach quite to the base of these cliffs ; and it is to the sands spread beneath them that Slughnatraigh owes its ill-omened name. Quicksands they are, of the most treacherous and tenacious quality. Woeful has been the fate of many a one who,

setting foot unawares on their smooth grey face, has felt a cold mouth open and fasten upon him, enlarging itself, and gaping wider and deeper for him the more wildly he struggles against its grip, until at last, half sucked in, half sinking, he goes helplessly under, and the rest of his miserable tragedy, stifled away from light and air, is to be surmised only by the heaving and quivering, which subside slowly, as the death-trap gulps down its victim. More than once it has happened that those trailing bramble bushes have served as bait. On this bog-land they grow rarely enough to make blackberries seem a covetable prize; and roving children have sometimes been lured by the sight of them into terrible toils.

They attracted Min now, and she pointed them out to Atty, saying: "There might be an odd few berries stickin' on them yet," with which hope they began all the more eagerly to descend the rough track towards the beach. But when they had scrambled nearly half-way down, they came upon a much more important discovery. From behind a projecting crag gleamed into view the white-washed gable-end of a cabin. "Look there, Min," said Atty, who saw it first. "It's a house. If there's any people in it, they'd be apt to give us a bit of bread or somethin'." Min said: "Glory be—we'll try would they," and was hurrying on to make the experiment, when a sudden thought checked her.

"I declare to goodness," she said, "I believe it's the man-trappers' house. They said it was just

beyant the stones on the strand, and there's the big stones, sure enough, and there's itself. We'd a right to not go near it."

Min's conjecture was so far correct. The man-trappers did live almost on the verge of Slughna-traigh, in fact to its neighbourhood was partly due their long-continued ill-repute, as many an anxious parent endeavoured to scare the children from that real and ghastly danger of the place by setting up the man-trappers as a half-mythical bogey. All the rumours she had ever heard about them now occurred to Min. She remembered how a cross-looking old woman had been pointed out to her at Mass as the mother of the man-trappers, and how she had been assured that any one of the family would drown a person as soon as look at him. Here on the spot, these stories seemed more true and more terrific than ever before, and Min resolved firmly that, hungry or no, she and Atty must give the house as wide a berth as possible, without returning to the desolate bog. "Let's try first is there e'er a blackberry yet," she said, "and after that we can creep along down close by the edge of the say below there. Some more houses is sure to be in it prisently a wee bit further on."

She turned towards the thorn-clad rocks, with Atty following her. But their path brought them at one point a fuller view of the cabin with its blue smoke-plume, and glint of red fire through the open door, outside which a pinkish pig and several speckled hens rooted and pecked round

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a large black pot, while a white goat browsed on the patch of thrift-sprinkled sward. And all this looked so home-like to Atty, who was just then less conscious of fear than of a chilly hunger, that he warily lagged behind Min, till he found an opportunity to slip aside, and make a dart for the scene which seemed to him much more attractive and hopeful than those dark bushes shivering in the bleak morning wind.

Mrs Mulrane was mixing meal and water for stirabout on the dresser, when a shrill sound of singing rose up suddenly close by: "What is it to goodness?" she wondered with a start, for nothing like it had been heard there since her sons grew up; and going to the door, she was aware of a very small boy in a bluish woollen bib, who sang the louder at her approach. It had struck Atty that a rendering of his most popular lay might prove a successful introduction, and accordingly:

"I would I were a mountain pig,"

he was chanting,

*"I would indeed bedad;
I would I were a mountain pig
A-aitin' of some bread.
I would I were a mountain pig
A-drinkin' of some milk—
I would I were a mountain pig
A-gettin' bits of food."*

The last line vibrated with a vehement shrillness, and Mrs Mulrane said: "Och, whist, whist.

Where at all are you streelin' about to at this time of day?" For she was never very early astir, and had but lately made up her fire.

"We're goin' home to wherever the town is," said Atty, "And if I had e'er an ould crust of bread, I'd sing you a lot more of the 'Mountain Pig' before I began aitin' it at all."

With an abrupt dive backwards Mrs Mulrane vanished indoors and speedily reappeared. Her hands were filled with the remains of last night's supper, two flat griddle-cakes, either of which would cover this page. "Here's for you," she said, interrupting a piercing *I would*. "Take them, and stop your mouth, and run off home wid them, before you have the crathur inside roused up."

This crathur was in reality a most harmless person, but the vagueness of the term left room for alarming imaginations, and Atty, with an uncomfortable remembrance about the man-trappers, ran off as fast as he could to join Min, whom he soon saw clambering on the low rocks across a smooth stretch of sand. The rocky spit went dwindling seaward, and ended in a line of detached boulders with sandy spaces between, like a row of stepping-stones, only suited, however, to a giant's striding; and the last boulder was almost reached by the white edge of the tide as it came seething in. Beyond the cold slate-coloured water a band of dull red lingered on the north-western horizon, a belated remnant drifted round from the morning glow.



THE FOOT-STICKS OF SLUGHNATRAIGH 91

Running at the top of his speed, with both hands full, Atty tripped up over a shrivelled black coil of seaweed, knotted to a stony weight, and he came down headlong on the sand. He fell soft, and at first his chief concern was to recover his two cakes, which had flown out of his grasp; but when he scrambled to his feet, it was only to feel that cold clammy mouth closing round his ankles, and to find himself sinking, swiftly, horribly, until all the solid world seemed to be crumbling away beneath him. Min, who had come hurrying to meet him, almost rushed into the same entanglement, but luckily stood still on the lowest boulder, a small, sea-weedy slab, scarcely showing above the sand, whence she reached him a hand before it was too late. "What ailed you at all?" she said reprovingly, as he struggled up beside her. "Can't you walk where it's firm-like?" But immediately afterwards, attempting to set foot on a firm-like place, she plunged down even more deeply than he had done, and floundered back again in much affright.

Their plight, in truth, was extremely grave, and the more so, the less they understood the real nature of their peril. On one side the rough breakers were rolling in loud and swift, and all round was spread the deadly snare of the quicksand. At any moment the children might be urged by the more visible danger to flee into the jaws of the more fatal one too far for retreat. Meanwhile, however, they only uttered dismayed

little shrieks as they groped vainly with tentative half-steps in every direction for a footing they never could find.

It was just at this time that Stacey Colgan with her daughters, and the widow Joyce, and old six-pound-ten Gallaher, accompanied by several lads and lasses, reached the end of the shingle belt, which forms the beach most of the way from Clochranbeg to Slughnatraigh. They had gone out early in quest of salt leaves, and finding these scarce, had wandered on till they came to the precincts of the man-trappers. A possibility of lighting upon the missing strange childer was present to their minds, though nobody thought them likely to be astray upon the strand, and the seekers for them had scattered themselves over the bogs and along the roads. So the whole party were surprised and excited when Judy Colgan exclaimed that she saw a couple of people over yonder down by the water, and that according to her belief it was the strange childer themselves.

"True for her, themselves they are bedad," Mrs Joyce declared. "I know them by Min's red skirt. Besides, who else would it be stravadin' about there? And they in the very worst of the soft places, sure it's destroyed they'll be. Woman dear, what'll we do at all?"

No sooner was their identity established, than the nimblest of the gossoons and *girsheachs* raced off homewards, partly for help, and partly from emulous eagerness to communicate with the least delay the doubly sensational news that the strange

childer were after bein' got below on the strand, and they about drownin' themselves dead in the middle of Slughnatraigh. The rest of the party advanced as close as they dared to the verge of the dangerous ground, and stood there in a group, clamorous as sea-fowl, and as little to the purpose. For a strong breeze beat back the sound of their voices, so that their injunctions to "stand studdy where ye are, and set hand nor fut off of the dry stone for your lives," never reached Min and Atty, who in any case would not probably have profited much thereby. But more effectual aid was at hand. By-and-by these helpless onlookers saw that two young men were coming rapidly down along the rocky spit, and finally jumping from one detached boulder to the other, till only a narrow sand strip separated them from the children. "They be Pat and Art Mulrane," said Mrs Colgan; and by the dropping of the nickname she unconsciously showed that in this desperate crisis she had fixed some hopes upon their friendly intervention.

The first action of the brothers was hardly encouraging. One of them shook his fist fiercely at the children, and his threatening shout rose above the dull drumming of the rollers.

"If them barbarous young miscreants of man-trappers take and do anythin' agin the unfortunate little crathurs now, I hope they'll get hung for it, I do so," the Widow Joyce said half-whimpering. Biddy Colgan simply ran away screeching, because, as she afterwards explained,

she'd as lief not be seein' the two of them *massacred* or swallowed up.

"Och be aisy," Six-pound-ten said to the widow. "Sure it's only dispersuadin' them he'd be of skytin' out into the soft holes. Ah, woman, have sinse."

Pat Mulrane had in fact roared at the children, who seemed about to rush towards him: "Don't you offer to stir an atom off that, you young thieves of the world, or it's settin' the dog here at yous I'll be to ait yous alive." He would have found it difficult to carry out this threat, as Garry, the black-and-tan collie, himself had been once nearly engulfed, and ever since had resolutely avoided setting a paw on doubtful places. However it effectually deterred Atty and Min, who remained rooted in dismay. A finishing-touch seemed added to their tribulations by the advent of these notorious bugbears, at whom they had now and then flung with due circumspection a censorious pebble or clod. As they cowered together, motionless and mute, Min could only make some vindictive grimaces with her face hidden on Atty's sleeve, and Atty thought wildly of setting up a propitiatory song, but could not screw up courage to begin.

Meanwhile a brief and anxious colloquy was going on between the two man-trappers. The urgency of the situation allowed scant time for words, and small choice of deeds. In a few moments the swift rising of the tide would swamp the children on their little ledge of safety, and though that lay within a man's jump of the

Mulrane's station, to spring upon it without dislodging its other occupants was, by reason of its diminutive size and slippery surface, an altogether impossible feat.

"Musha, good gracious, what at all quare antic is the fellow at now?" commented Mrs Colgan to her criticising companions on the other side of Slughnatraigh, as they saw Pat Mulrane suddenly plunge forward as if about to dive off the lowest shelf of the rock. "Is it fallin' after his head he'd be, to the back of everythin' else?"

"Begorra, it's makin' a foot-stick of himself he is," Six-pound-ten averred, "to let the children across," and so it was.

By wedging his toes tightly into a crevice of the big boulder, and gripping with both hands a hold of the slimy, tawny-podded wreaths on the small one, Pat, prone at full length, just spanned the interval between them, over which Art stepped thus on a footbridge, and returned with a frightened child swinging from either arm. This manoeuvre was executed with the utmost despatch, yet barely in time, for Pat's precarious clutch of the slithery seaweed failed just as the other three were safely landed, so that down he went face foremost into the smothering slough, whence his brother hauled him out, blinded, half-choked, hideous to behold in a mask of blue-black oozy mire, after a desperate wrestle with the clinging horror of Slughnatraigh.

All serious danger, nevertheless, was at an end once they were set high and dry upon the big

boulder, where they could wait securely until the rescue was completed with the help of inanimate planks and ropes. The strange childer were before long transferred to the Mulranes' house, and joined there by the Colgans with their party. Not for many a year had Mrs Mulrane entertained so much company, and more kept dropping in through the afternoon, as rumours reached the town, and brought neighbours to investigate upon the spot.

Deep concern had prevailed at Clochranbeg towards the close of the day before, when Min and Atty were found to have entirely and unaccountably disappeared. Not only were the children general favourites, but a feeling existed that the parish was in some measure responsible for them, and that a slur would be cast upon it if they were allowed, as Joe Fottrell said, "to go to loss." Most people had a sense that such an event would be unlucky as well as lamentable. Search-parties had been roaming over the bogs all night, and some were still going to and fro among their holes and hillocks; but an opinion that they would not again be seen alive was steadily gaining ground.

Nobody wandered more widely and with a more distracted mind than Mrs O'Hagan, the strange childer's landlady, who was reproaching herself bitterly for having "maybe scared them away wid blamin' them for th'ould kilt hin, and talkin' about the Union." She had gone so far afield that the news of their recovery did not find her till near sunset, and even then in the shape of reports at once disquieting and contradictory. Some said

that the strange childer had been last seen right in the middle of Slughnatraigh. Some that old Mrs Mulrane had hunted them away from her door, and set the dog at them. Others, with much convincing persistency and detail, related that the man-trappers "were after drownin' both of them below on the strand, and they screechin' the way you might hear them in Derry."

Her relief was therefore intense when she found them happily established by the Mulranes' fire, little the worse for their adventures, which several neighbours graphically recounted to her, laying especial stress upon the heroism displayed by Pat Mulrane, who had come, Six-pound-ten said, "widin an ames ace of losin' his life over it." Upon Pat, who still looked limp and woebegone as he sat in the chimney-corner, Mrs O'Hagan showered, vastly to his further discomfort, profuse praises and benedictions.

"Long sorry I'd be," she said in peroration, "to be passin' remarks agin any person in the parish, but I question is there e'er another boy in it that would take and make a foot-stick of himself above the bewitched ould houles yonder, that's neither land nor water, unless 'twas the Divil had the stirrin' of them together accordin' to some plan of his own, as is like enough, for the unnathural thrimblin' and quakin's in them yit. Sure now, if it wasn't only for yourself, Pat Mulrane, it's at the black bottom of that awful place them two little imps of innocent crathurs 'ud be lyin' this minyit, supposin' there is a bottom to

it at all, instead of sittin' here as grand as you plase, aitin' bread and treckle, the bould little tormints, and half the parish heart-scalded runnin' over the country after them the lenth of the night."

"Och, they're welcome, ma'am," Pat muttered ambiguously.

"Take a cup of tay, ma'am ; it's dry you're apt to be after all that fine talk you're givin' Pat," his mother said with a sub-acid suavity, for while exulting on his behalf she retained a resentful memory of her last visit to Mrs O'Hagan, and of Dan's rejected suit.

Mrs O'Hagan accepted the tea unsuspectingly, though protesting that she had only looked in to fetch home the children ; yet in the end she went her way without them. The Mulranes were loth to relinquish them so soon, chiefly on account of Maggie Dowling, who from her imprisoning box-bed declared that "the little gossoon wid his quare song done her heart good," and who seemed sadly cast down by the prospect of their departure. "You might lave them at all events," Mrs Mulrane suggested, "till the crathur's tired of the fantigue." And Mrs O'Hagan consented, mindful of what poverty prevailed in her own and her neighbours' houses, and not ignorant that the Mulranes were at this time some degrees better off than the rest. As for Min and Atty themselves, the friendliness of Garry, and the abundance of freshly-baked griddle cakes, very sufficiently reconciled them to their change of quarters.

In this way it came about that the strange

childer took up their abode with the man-trappers, and one result of it was that the latter shook off the bad name which had been fastened upon them. From that day the youth of Clochranbeg transferred their animosity to unchancy Slughnatraigh, which they thenceforth regarded with increased dread and aversion, and at whose impassively sullen, grey face they pelted vanishing stones from an even more cautious distance than when the man-trappers had been their mark. Six-pound-ten's oft-repeated narrative of the strange childer's hair's-breadth escape always wound up with, "Ay, bedad, 'twas the fine foot-stick he made of himself entirely that time ;" and this helped to suggest the new nickname with which it somehow seemed necessary to replace the old. It became customary to speak of Pat Mulrane and his brother as "the foot-sticks," a title which, in the circumstances, nobody could shout after them with hostile derision. Moreover, as Min and Atty often accompanied them to the strand or the town, they were gradually drawn out of the isolation into which they had shrunk, and began to hold again some intercourse with their kind.

These changes were all more or less soothing to Mrs Mulrane, and under their influence she showed a perceptible diminution in the eccentricity and moodiness of her demeanour. But her clearing sky showed its brightest patch one day when a friend of the M'Evoys looked in on her charged with what were obviously overtures to

the making up of a match between their Lizzie and her Pat. On that occasion she uttered dark and riddling speeches, which would not have misbecomed an ancient Pythoness, or the heroine of an Æschylean drama, about people whose ignorance and pride "hindered them of taking what was offered them, when belike nothing ailed it all the while except bein' a dale too good for them, or the likes of them, and who were very apt to find they had missed their chances, if ever they come lookin' after it again."

Nevertheless this lifting of her clouds was only partial and transitory. Their shadow dropped upon her once more before the dissatisfied go-between had well re-crossed the threshold, and she fell into a gloomy reverie, standing idle at her door, while the chant of the *Mountain Pig* came faintly from the inner room, where it was beguiling that long spring afternoon for Maggie Dowling. If she had put her dejection into words they would have run somewhat as follows : "It's poor Dan I do be thinkin' bad of. Them other two boys might be right enough, but me heart's scalded about him, for he didn't get fairity wid it all, troth he did not. And it's blamin' me he is, I well know. There might be a letter at the office agin next Saturday, but it's not to me he'll write. Last time it was to Pat, and before that to Maggie and Art ; niver a word he sent to me. It's him I'm thinkin' bad of, the poor child. But I might maybe get news of him on Saturday."

OLD ISAAC'S BIGGEST HAUL

GRACE M'EVoy heard the boys talking about it after supper as they sat on the rocks before their doorway, in which she stood knitting ; and the conversation very much grieved and vexed her for several reasons. She was the only daughter of old Isaac M'Evoy, and sister of "the boys," so called merely because they were still unmarried. They were all three her elders, and she herself was "well on to thirty." Theirs was a fishing family, and the chief event of her days had always been the going and coming of the boat. Not the same boat, for their old *Granuaile*, condemned as unseaworthy, had lain discarded by the tiny rough pier for the last half-dozen years or so. Her successor and namesake, however, sadly dissatisfied old M'Evoy, who seldom failed to draw invidious comparisons between the two craft when embarking or disembarking. He had done so this evening as the *Granuaile* junior was being fastened to a staple wedged in among the boulders.

"Sure, if we'd been in *her*, the crathur," he had said, looking regretfully at the black, slug-like shape, "we'd ha' got home in one-half the time."

She knew how to be takin' advantage of every breath of win' she met wid. But this lump of a baste 'ill go sulkin' along wid herself before the handiest breeze ever blew in the bay, as sodden as a gob of mud."

"At all events," Thady had replied, handing out an oar to Grace, "*she* isn't apt to be springin' a leak on us any minyit, might land us to the bottom like a handful of cockles droppin' out of your pocket."

But his father had stumped unheeding across the shingle-strip that led indoors. He was smoking a last pipe now by the hearth, safely beyond hearing of his sons' discourse, although to Grace in the doorway the voices came so clearly that she sometimes glanced to and fro nervously, apprehensive lest they should penetrate too far.

"The long and the short of it is, it's too ould he's gettin'," summed up Thady, the middle brother; "we'd do a dale better wid him out of the boat."

"Ay would we so," said Tim, the youngest, "and himself would as well."

"If he'd contint himself at all," Joe said more doubtfully. "Goodness knows he's been at it long enough. But he's as headstrong as a two-year-ould; and, sure, how can we go agin the man, if he's got a mind to be comin' along?"

"What I was thinkin' is this," said Thady; "we might slip out early to-morra very quiet, before he's awake, and pick up young Farrelly goin' by

the point. *He's* smart enough. And then, wid nothin' on board delayin' us, we'd have a good chance of a bit of luck."

"Bedad, now, 'twould be the best way," Tim said with decision.

"Me father'd be ragin' and annoyed, belike, over it," Joe said with doubt.

"Sure, man, it's one of them things that can't be helped if he is, like the rain fallin' straight and the water flowin' crooked," said Thady. "He might better be ragin' than drowndin' himself and the whole of us, as he might very aisy one of these rough days, let alone losin' the mackerel on us. It stands to raison we'll have to take and lave him behind sooner or later if he won't lave himself. We can bid Grace tell him we didn't like to be disturbin' him that early, and she'll contrive to pacify him. If he wants to be doin' somethin' there's plinty of nets to mend."

After a little further discussion this plan was adopted, and as a preliminary step the boys presently went indoors to bed, for they agreed that they must start with the soon-returning summer sun. But their sister lingered for a while in the doorway, looking out into the waning twilight with a pucker of anxiety between her eyes and an angry grief at her heart.

"Cruel annoyed himself 'ill be," was the burden of her meditations, "cruel annoyed. And he as gay and plisant in his mind this evenin' as anythin', and sayin' it looked to be grand fishin' weather the morra—and so it will, worse luck ;

but they'll all be after slippin' off wid themselves on him, and nobody only me about the place to thry put a good face on it, and I might as well spare meself the trouble, for he'll see the raison they done it as plain as I see the moon risin' up behind Slieve Sterran. Sure now, if I was them, I'd liefer every mackerel ever swum in the green say went to loss than to be vexin' him that way, the crathur, troth I would so. . . . And Thady agin him, that he thought a dale on ever," she continued bitterly. "I wouldn't scarce have believed it of him. But ah, sure, after all 'tisn't Thady's fau't entirely if Himself's gettin' ould—a thrifle ouldish—on us. Goin' on for eighty he is—and then suppose he went, and by chance anythin' happint him?" Grace had lived too long by the sea to underrate the risk of such chances. "I daren't say a word," she said to herself, "only it's sorry I am in me heart wid thinkin' of one thing and the other."

So, still disconsolately thinking, she shut herself into the dark little house, with a mind full of evil auguries for the morrow.

And next morning everything began to happen very much in accordance with her forecasts. It was serene blue and white weather when she awoke somewhat later than usual, because her unquiet thoughts had delayed her falling asleep. There was not a sound to be heard, and for a while she cherished a hope that her father had been roused after all, and that the plans of the boys for leaving him behind had thus come harm-

lessly to naught. But presently her heart, hopes and all, sank plump down, like a full jug when you let go its handle in the well, for a call came from without: "Grace! Grace!" in tones of peremptory excitement.

Old Isaac was tramping about on the boulders when she obeyed his summons. He was a tall, long-bearded old man, gaunt and stooped, and Grace fancied that he looked more gaunt and more stooped than usual this morning. The many lines on his face were complicated by fresh creases of anxiety, and the gaze he bent upon his daughter was as intent as if he had been landing a twelve-pound salmon in a doubtful net.

"What the mischief and all's took the boys and the boat?" was the question he had been waiting there to ask her. The hope he was cherishing was that he might hear they were only gone a little way to get bait, or on some such errand, and would be calling back for him. But Grace replied, in as innocent and matter-of-course a manner as she could: "Is it the boys? Sure they went off wid themselves this good while ago. Startin' early they had to be for fear of missin' the tide in the Headstones. Away beyond that they said they would be goin' after the mackerel, and they thought bad of wakenin' you out of your sleep."

Down sank her father's hope, and up swelled his wrath. "So that's what they done on me," he said. "That's the thrick they're after playin' on me—the young thieves of the world!"

"Just for 'fraid of wakenin' you," Grace interposed, clinging desperately to her one flimsy excuse. "For 'fraid of wakenin' you out of your sleep, daddy darlint."

"Ay, begor, afraid of that they'd be, sure enough," said he.

"'Deed were they," Grace said, eagerly receiving his assent as a sign that he accepted her explanation. "Rael quiet and cautious they must ha' went, the way you wouldn't be woke."

"The divil doubt it. Arrah then, git along wid yourself out of that, standin' there tellin' lies," he said, turning upon her with a sudden savageness. "Is it dotin' and demented you consait I am, forby an ould creepin' cripple? The schemers, the villins—well enough they seen 'twould be a grand day for the fishin', so they thought they'd slink off and do whatever plased themselves widout me obsthructin' of them—that taught every one of them to handle an oar. I'm no better in a boat these times—and it me own boat—than a lump of ballast; that's the opinion they have of me. And wishin' the whole pack of them is—Thady and all the rest of yous—wishin' I was in me clay, instead of to be wastin' their time, if you plase, and hinderin' them of their chances because I'm grown a bit stiff and clumsy. Git along wid yourself, and hould your fool's tongue."

Grace retreated indoors, where she stood aimlessly by the grey hearth, too much dejected to set about stirring up the smouldering peat-sod.

"They'd a right to be ashamed of themselves to go do such a thing on him," she was thinking, "but I wouldn't be sayin' aught agin them anyway behind their backs. 'Twould only annoy Himself there the worse, and indeed now they have him greatly annoyed—a good-for-nothin' pack they are. And I dunno is there a hand's turn I could be doin' for him, unless I baked him a bit of griddle-cake for the breakfast. But as like as not he wouldn't look at it."

On these sad reflections broke a sound which sent her darting out of doors again. It was the rattle of a chain, and a grating on the shingle, such as betoken arrivals and departures by water. And there, indeed, was her father, fumbling about the fastenings of the old *Granuaile*. In a moment the rusty bolt slipped, falling with a clank, and he began to shove her down seaward.

"Och, saints above! What are you at, father, at all?" Grace called to him aghast.

But he only continued to push the boat. The light canvas frame slid along expeditiously, and close to the water's edge he righted it with a sudden twist.

"You aren't ever thinkin' to go out in that ould crathur?" Grace protested, pursuing him in extreme consternation. "And she lyin' there this half-dozen year and more, and leakin' like twenty sieves."

"Bedad then, it's fine and dhry she ought to be by this time," old Isaac replied grimly.

"To be sure, in coorse you wouldn't be that

cracked and crazy," Grace asserted with a confidence she was far from feeling.

"Never you mind troublin' yourself to consider how cracked and how crazy I've a fancy to be," said her father. "Quare enough in his head you might say anybody was that 'ud sit at home the best fishin' day of the saison; and it's not what I'm goin' to do, not for to plase all the impident young rapscallions in Ireland. Run along and be fetchin' me the coil of line there's lyin' on the ledge of the back windy."

But instead of running Grace sat down on the rugged little pier-end and began to cry miserably in the golden early sunshine. "It's dhrowndin' yourself on us you'll be, I well know," she said. "And ne'er a bit of breakfast you've had, and the fire not made up to be gettin' you anythin' quick—och, what 'ill become of me at all at all? For it's sinkin' under your feet she'll be."

Her father answered nothing, but stumped off into the house, whence he soon re-appeared laden with a coil of line, a small bundle, and a flappy brownish roll—the boat-sail, in fact, which he had reached down from among the rafters. The sight of these final preparations seemed to freeze Grace into composure. She watched him silently for a while as he fitted the little mast into its socket and shifted boards and benches. Then she said, in the tone of one stating some incontrovertible proposition: "Well, you'll have me along wid you, anyhow, daddy. Joe always says it's meself's the great one for pullin' and balin'

out ; and mindin' the boat I'll be while yourself's fishin'."

At this her father chuckled cheerfully as he spliced a rope. "Why to be sure," he said, "unless it's one of the ould hins I'll be bringin' along to take care of me, or maybe ould Tib, the cat, 'ud suit me better. In coorse I'll be takin' the aither or the other of yours. Just you wait there aisy till I do, me dear."

"May goodness forgive me, but it's yourself's the ungovernable man," Grace said, and then stood watching him in dumb despair. He had apparently recovered his spirits, and laughed to himself occasionally ; but Grace saw his hands shaking as he tied the knots, and she felt bitterly that her own hands were bound into helplessness by some invincible, invisible power.

The fair morning seemed to her like a dismal parody of other fair mornings very long ago, when she, a small child, used to be watching him get ready to go out fishing alone, for the boys were not yet big enough to give any substantial assistance. Hale and hearty he was in those days, and the thought of his ever being otherwise occurred to her no more than did doubts about the sun's duly rising. And when he had rowed or sailed away she could run indoors to her mother with her razor-shells and wonderfully curious pebbles. Now, with Herself dead on them this ten year, and Himself, old and feeble, setting off to get drowned, for all she could do or say, she seemed to have

strayed a terribly long way from that care-free paradise.

Suddenly a change in the light made her look round, and as suddenly she plucked her father by the sleeve. "It isn't goin' to be anyways such fine weather, then, at all," she announced triumphantly. "Look at the fog where it's blowin' in like a stone wall. Sorra the boat i'll be after mackerel in the bay this day whatever."

Grace was right in her facts. One of the low-lying cloud-banks that wander more perilously than the ancient Jostling Rocks upon the plains of ocean had drifted shoreward by some caprice of the wind, and was now crowding into half a hundred inlets, among them the M'Evoys' creek. She was wrong, however, in the conclusion to which she had so happily hurried, and she speedily learned her mistake.

"Well now," old Isaac said deliberately, looking round the shrunken horizon, "all I can say is that if there was five fogs in it, or fifty fogs, or five hundred for the matter of that, every one of them on the top of the other, niver a bit I'd be at a loss of me day's fishin' for the likes of them—or anybody else," and he stepped on board with a determined stride.

"And the boys 'ill go to loss in it too, belike," Grace said, standing by in her woe; "ne'er a one of yous 'ill ever be comin' home to me again, and I haven't a sowl in the width of the world. I wisht to God I was away in the ould buryin'-ground there at Lisannagh, along wid Herself,

and then me heart wouldn't be broke among yous all."

Her father, now in the very act of pushing off, gave no signs of hearing, and she sat down upon the pier, oppressed by utter despondency. If she had any motive at all for lingering there it must have been supplied by her last flicker of hope. The boys, she thought, might possibly soon return, to be instantly despatched in quest of the mistrusted *Granuaile*.

How long Grace sat, crouched on the stones with her head in her hands, she could not have guessed. All her thoughts were out at sea, whence it seemed to her that news, good or bad, must soonest come. But it was a sound of steps clattering on the loose shingle behind her that first caused her to start up expectant. And what she saw made her stand gazing in wide-eyed terror. For the newcomer was young Farrelly, the boys' comrade, alone, bare-headed and wet-haired, with drops glistening and falling as he moved.

"Is it you then, Con Farrelly?" she said. "And what's gone wid the rest of them?"

"Och, Grace, mavrone—the Headstones!" said Con Farrelly.

Now the Headstones is a name of fear round about Kilavawn. It has been bestowed on a small square-shaped bay which bears an evil reputation. The salt water has there flowed over the grey crested ridges of a sea-sunken hill, and these rocks emerge in such numbers that they give it some-

what the aspect of a burial-ground. Jagged reefs and sandy bars help to make the place a very difficult passage to thread safely, even in fair weather ; storms, and especially fogs, convert it into a mazy labyrinth of perils. Many a luckless keel has missed the clue and come to fatal grief among them. Con's brief answer, therefore, conjured up a clear and cruel picture in Grace's imagination.

"Is it dthrownded all of them was, and you comin' away?" she asked calmly.

"Look you, Grace, you crathur, this was the way of it," Con said in a breathless hurry. "Takin' the short cut through the Headstones we were, intendin' to thry off Malinish, when up come the fog like a wing clappin' down on us, and we in among the thick of them snaggy rocks—you could see as far through a feather pillow—and a win' whistlin' up along wid it. So the first thing we knew, on agin a one we druv, and knocked a big houle in her—she wouldn't keep afloat while you would be shippin' an oar, that's sartin, and sure you know ne'er a one of them swims a stroke, only meself. So they bid me get to shore, if I could at all, and they'd make a shift to hould on to the rock—but, telling you the truth, I misdoubt could they. I heard them lettin' a woeful shout just afore I come to land, that was the most I could do," he confessed. "But I run round along this strand, thinkin' I'd borry the loan of your other ould boat, and thry would there be e'er a chance of raichin' to them in

her—she'd be apt to keep afloat that far—and the fog's liftin' a bit. I might maybe find them right enough yet, if I had no delayin'. Where have you her lyin' now?"

"Sure me father's took and dhrownded himself in her this mornin', Con," Grace said, quietly still. "He wouldn't take me along wid him, sorra a bit would he, or else 'twould ha' all happint very handy like. But the ould boat's gone."

"The Lord be good to us, Grace, is it romancin' you are?" asked Con. "Why, what would bewitch the man to do such a thing all of a suddint? Ne'er a word the lads told me of his comin' out this day. True for you, though—the boat's away; and what am I to be at next?"

"Why wouldn't you go look for another one, then, this minyit?" Grace said with a flash of vehemence. "Wasn't you sayin' there might be a chance yet? And is it standin' there you are and talkin' foolish, instead of runnin' for your life?"

"Runnin' I could be fast enough," said Con, "but where to thry for a boat's more than I can tell. Divil a one have I in me mind that I could be layin' me hand on. Howane'er, I'll do me endeavours, Grace M'Evoy, troth will I so."

Con darted off again along the beach, and was quickly out of sight. He left Grace in an infinite solitude. She had spoken truly when declaring that her father and brothers were all she possessed, for outside the little circle gathered round yonder central hearth-fire she could count no

kinsfolk and few neighbours. Daddy and Joe and Thady and Tim, she felt certain that she was never to behold one of them more.

Under stress of that appalling belief she could only cower down among the boulders, closing eyes and ears to the outer world with a fold of her grey shawl, as if she might thus exclude also the inward desolation. She was holding back her thoughts much as she would have held her breath, drowning under deep water, conscious all the while that the terrible moment could not be long deferred.

"Grace, you big gawk! Is it asleep or wool-gatherin' you are? Sittin' crooched there like an ould wet hin. Grace, you great *stronsach* you—instead of catchin' a holt of the rope, and us bawlin' to you this last half-hour."

Her father's voice thus loudly accosting her broke roughly on her muffled ears. But seraphic strains could not have sounded to Grace more bewilderingly sweet. Up she started out of her black dream. The white fog had lifted and lightened wonderfully, so that there were golden gleams shining about its farthest silvery edges; but this was not what she saw. For close by bobbed up and down the old *Granuaile*, with her father standing in the bow, just striking the sail, and with all the three boys sitting in the stern, safe and sound, albeit rather sheepish and disconcerted of demeanour. Grace seized the tossed rope, and in another minute the whole party were tramping on the noisy stones. They had no fish to unload—not so much as a herring.

"Well, Grace, it's the quare fine haul I'm after bringin' home this day at all evints," said old Isaac, "the biggest ever I took—if it was good for much, which it may be, or maybe it mayn't. Where am I after findin' them? Sure now, tellin' you the truth, 'twas more be good luck than good guidance I happint on them, for the fog was that thick you couldn't sort your fingers from your thumbs, when I come where I heard the bawls. But says I to meself: 'That's Thady,' says I, 'be the powers, it is himself.' For he was a great hand at the roarin' if anythin' wint agin him, ever since he was the len'th of a sizeable mackerel. And, be the same token," he continued, "very prisently I come widin a knife's edge of scrapin' destruction into the ould boat off the lump of a rock me three hayroes there was sittin' gathered up atop of. And bedad now, accordin' to the look of them, for all the pleasure they were gettin' out of it they needn't ha' throubled themselves to be flouncin' off that outrageous early—and bad manners to them—before other people had got rightly asleep. They might be none the worser if they waited till their hurry was over."

"Och wirrasthrew, dad, you've got the laugh agin us this time, and no mistake," Joe said with his wonted good-humoured grin, "and we're very apt to not hear the last of it this saison anyway."

Joe's forebodings proved to be well founded. But the morning's event had another result which nobody would have predicted. Old Isaac has

never gone fishing again. Many a time—such is the contrariness of the human mind—have Joe and Thady and Tim come talking to him persuasively and wistfully about the grandeur of the weather, but his answer is always the same. “I’m after takin’ me biggest haul,” he says, “and nothin’ less ’ud satisfy me now. Stoppin’ at home I’ll be and contintin’ meself wid that.”

THE WRONG TURNING

I

DWELLERS at and around Beltranagh assert that a man who can find his way about their shore by daylight "won't be bothered anywhere else in the dark," and the saying is tintured with truth. For those high cliffs, which show to the waves and west winds a long front seldom broken, seem to have been left with the *débris* of their building materials littered at their base so profusely that it crops up perpetually above the water-pavement, or, still more perilously, lurks unseen just below the surface. The sea is thick with rocks and reefs, shoals and bars, which so vary in aspect and obstructiveness from tide to tide that to thread the shifting labyrinth is a difficult feat even for a mariner holding the clue of maturest experience. It is perhaps most intricate just outside Carrickawn Bank, a long shingly isthmus lying stretched across the mouth of one of the few gaps in that great cliff-wall which here abruptly swerves inland to form a deep embrasure filled with a hill-girt lough. Such a mere thread is the isthmus in breadth that only its extremely tenacious stuff

could have refused to snap ages since under the stress of thundering seas. A piled-up glacia of smooth oval granite stones, like an ogre's sugar-almonds, each one a heavy two-handsful, slopes seaward almost its whole length, and so far has clattered defiance when the clutching foam leaps highest to snatch it down. But near the northern end is one weak point, where the gigantic pebbles are scattered sparsely with silvery sand showing between them ; and it seems probable that, in the course of some thousand centuries, the Atlantic will there break through into Lough Orren. Meanwhile, not many years back, the inhabitants of Beltranagh Farmhouse used the slight depression in the shingle-bank as a sheltered berth for their couple of boats.

The Beltranagh Farm seems a curiously situated little homestead even for that countryside, where tillage is carried on in unlikely places, and holdings have not uncommonly a more or less amphibious character. Its existence is due to a small triangle of "land," as opposed to "strand" wedged in between the foot of the cliffs and one end of the stony isthmus. A jut of the towering rock-wall screens a few precious stacks and sheds from the full sweep of the west wind, but the dwelling-house itself stands aloof from this protection, and faces the sea across only a meagre dryish strip, even at low water. It has two windows and a door below, and three windows above, and is washed with a livid silurian blue, which seems to parody the colour of its surround-

ings. About it are shredded the short-furrowed patches, with soil dwindling towards their dykes from mitigated to unmitigated sand and shingle. Potatoes struggle there sometimes into fairly vigorous existence; and old John Moriarty's whim was always to have a scrap "down in oats," which kept him "heart-scalded" half the year. He was a proud man if his grain-crop loaded "the little ass" or the slug-shaped curragh. This scantiness of the farm produce certainly saved some trouble, as all that went to market had to be conveyed painfully along the rough natural causeway, or at the owner's greater risk by the lapping water, which in wild weather can rage fiercely even on the landward side of the barrier. Up the steeps behind the house nothing less primitive than a goat-and-gossoon path leads to nothing more civilised than a wet bog, while at the further end of the isthmus you come upon only one road that deserves the name, blustery, sea-skirting, three lonesome miles long before it begins to be fringed with the outlying cabins of Haganstown. As for the boreen that turns off to the left and runs along the lough shore, it very soon degenerates into the rudest of cart-tracks, and except for the name of the thing you might as well take your own way across the grassy-ledged hill-slopes, girdled with sheep-walks and seamed with water-courses.

When Jim Moriarty came back to Beltranagh Farm, after an absence of more than a dozen years, there were circumstances that threatened to

make a peace-lover's course as troublesome steering as if it had literally lain among the adjacent reefs and shoals. He was the eldest son of old John Moriarty, whose death had been the cause of his return to a home from which a falling out with his stepmother in early youth had banished him to employment in a woollen manufactory at Mallow. The joining of threads so long severed always calls for considerable tact and adroitness, but Jim brought to his job, which was unusually complicated, rather less than an average equipment of these qualities. He found the household now consisting of his brother and sister, Andy and Biddy, whom he had parted from as children, and his much younger half-brother, Jack, whom he had never met at all, so that he must needs make three new acquaintances, a thing he was slow to do. But he had not simply to deal with the inevitable estrangement of absence; there was also his father's will. By this document John Moriarty, to the surprise of all parties concerned, divided his property, comprising several acres, into six equal shares, three of which he left to his son Jim, and one apiece to his other children. Furthermore, Jim had power to buy out his brethren compulsorily, if he pleased, or sell the farm to somebody else; so that his position was one of very commanding superiority.

The fact was that these dispositions had been made not many months back by old John in a spleenful mood, which caused the absent—who are not quite always unduly blamed—to appear less dis-

tasteful than the perpetually and irritatingly present. "The little gossoon's an ass," their father had grumbled to himself. "And the other two's as headstrong as a couple of pigs—done the very thing I bid them to not do wid the Kerry heifer. It's my belief Jim 'ud make a better offer at lookin' after the place, if he got the chance." And acting upon these views he instructed Councillor Dowdall that Jim's the chance was to be. But Jim's brother and sister were vastly aggrieved, the more so because for the last year or two they had managed domestic affairs much as they would; and they immediately formed the opinion that this arrangement had been designedly brought about by his "slutherin" letters to their father. Jim's letters had been in reality few and brief, and entirely free from sentiment. Andy and Biddy, however, were guided less by probabilities than by a natural desire for an object of resentment still accessible. Jim would have borne the whole brunt of theirs had they not been constrained by other considerations to manifest it in modified forms. They dared not quarrel utterly with a person who could no doubt oust them from the old home in which their affections were rooted. Accordingly their behaviour was a series of compromises between wrath and prudence. They stopped short at direct accusations and confined themselves to innuendoes. Andy never "up and tould him to his face that he was a schemin' villin, and had as good as grabbed the bit of land off them behind their backs." He

only muttered, with the vague allusiveness of Greek tragedy, about "some he could name that had been a great hand at featherin' their nest with the scrawm of a pen now and agin and the price of a penny stamp." And if Biddy at dinner-time wore the aspect of a Gorgon who had tasted something bitterly unpalatable, or if she flounced ostentatiously out of the room upon Jim's entrance, she would afterwards apologise through the medium of hot cake for supper, or an offer to do a bit of mending. More overt demonstrations must, they felt, be deferred until their present precarious position became assured one way or the other.

Jim himself was both more and less alive than they supposed to the state of their feeling. Under a somewhat stolid demeanour he concealed no small chagrin at the discovery that "them two weren't anyways disposed to be over-friendly." But his wits were not quick, and his conscience was clear of anything except a regret that he had kept aloof from Beltranagh all those years nor sought to restore amicable relations with his father more effectually than by intermittent letters; and this made him slow to guess the true cause of their animosity. Thus the sallies which they themselves feared might have gone too far failed to reach him with explanatory effect; he merely perceived that they were meant to be somehow disagreeable.

Yet even if Andy and Biddy had been "a bit pleasanter in themselves," Jim would have found Beltranagh a dreary abode, comfortless within as

without, and remote from familiar friends and occupations. His stay there would most likely have been brief only for the special circumstance that at this time his right arm was still partially crippled by an accident, which hindered him from attending to his business, and made him think it advisable to spend his enforced leisure rent free on his property. So while he waited for the tardy re-knitting of injured ligaments and sinews, the season slid on from autumn into winter. His chief resource at first against the monotony of those empty hours, and his hankering after the meadow and woodlands about Mallow, lay in the companionship of his young half-brother Jack. Rather dull and backward for his nine years was Jack, partly by nature, and partly owing to a life of singular isolation and insipidity, flavoured only with acids and bitters infused at the discretion of elders' uncertain humours. It was a strange joy for him to associate with a person whose temper seemed to be uniformly unruffled, and whose dexterity, even though one-handed, appeared quite marvellous. By the time that Jim had constructed a fascinating miniature lake and canal with loughs on it among the boulders, Jack had become his faithfully attached ally. Whereupon Biddy expressed to Andy some gloomy expressions: "Mark my words," she would say, "it's makin' a fool of the little ape he is, the way he'll have him aisy persuaded to stop along wid himself here whenever he throws the two of us out of it, as he's apt to take and do one of these days.

And then 'twill be mighty convanient for me fine gentleman to keep the poor child growin' up big and strong to be doin' him a man's work about the place for nothin'. That's what he's up to, you may depind." However, as weeks passed and he betrayed no disposition to encroach or interfere, much less evict, matters were, on the whole, tending towards improvement at the time of his first call upon the MacNees.

II

THE voyager up Lough Orren, having passed through the straits where it is cut nearly in two by the shears of opposing hills, will see on ahead a snowy gleam, which grows on his sight from what might be a floating lily, a gull's wing, a skiff's sail, into the white front of the MacNees' little house. It stands on a steep bank overlooking the lough, whence its reflection often strikes back sharp and clear, for this green-rimmed bowl of fair water is seldom a flawed mirror. Jim Moriarty had not been long at Beltranagh before he learned to welcome the white fleck when it came into view as he made his way towards it by boat or on foot. These MacNees were distant cousins of the Moriartys, and for all an intervening league, their nearest neighbours, so lopsided visiting terms were maintained between the two

families. That is to say, the Moriartys occasionally called upon the MacNees, who did not return their visits. It had long been a joke among them to apologise and account for this by declaring that the lough was double the length going backwards. Andy had more recently begun to add, with significance, to his versions of the jest: "Sure it knows who it does be separatin' us from, isn't that the raison, Lizzie?" But Lizzie had never yet "let on" that she heard him. It was true enough that the MacNees's situation seemed almost more out-of-the-way than their friends', considering the disabilities of the household: Mrs MacNee, an elderly little widow woman, with her two daughters, Maria an invalid, and Lizzie, whom her sister half wistfully called "as coggle-some about settin' out to go anywheres when she got the chance as if every fut she put down would be treadin' on red-hot pitaties." Accordingly they were rarely to be met abroad. Andy and Bidy were rowing over to them one fine Sunday afternoon when Bidy invited Jim to join the party, mainly that it might be graced by his fine Mallow tweed suit, but also to disoblige Andy, with whom she was temporarily affronted, and who she well knew would have preferred his brother's room. Jim, on his part, regretfully consented, lest they should "think too bad" of his refusal. But the expedition after all proved more agreeable than he could have by any means expected; he was afflicted much less than usual with gawky dumbness, and in fact found it

so possible to converse with Mrs MacNee that he regarded the visit as a rare social success. This encouraged him to repeat it, and he presently acquired a habit of doing so at short intervals. Sometimes he went with Andy and Biddy, but more often with Jack to supplement his one-armed rowing ; or he tramped alone round by the lough side, a longer and slower route. Soon, as he grew quite at his ease in the society of the quiet, good-natured sisters, their kitchen, being warm and weather tight, with a transfiguring illumination of fire-light shaken over it, seemed to him a far pleasanter living-room than his own at Beltranagh, which had several of the features of a sea-cave. Still, his original and permanent attraction was old Mrs MacNee in her frilled white cap and large-plaided little shawl, with her last-generation reminiscences, and her assumption, not displeasing to his consciousness of approaching thirty, that he had not yet ceased to be merely a youth.

Now nobody could be long in Mrs MacNee's company without becoming aware of her three ruling passions. These might be summed up as a love, a fear, and a hate, of which the respective objects were her son, ghosts, and spiders. None of these emotions existed unmixed with another. As no one holds any such possessions in fee simple, she had to pay a heavy fine of fear for her interest in Paddy, all the heavier on account of his absence in terribly far-off States. Fear, again, mingled with her abhorrence of the long-legged spinners, who, hideously sprawling, let themselves

down by sudden threads from the rafters "on top of a body's cap" maybe, or glanced in hobgoblin gallops over wall and floor. Nor could she truthfully have denied, though she dared not avow, a mortal antipathy to those ghostly enemies, whose presence, less frankly manifested, was scarcely a whit more doubtful, and more dreadful by far. She found it a solace to discourse about these things to a sympathetic hearer, and such a one she had in Jim Moriarty. With respect to Paddy and the ghosts he was nothing more. All he could do was to listen appreciatively while she expatiated on the various virtues of her son, or related how the lough and its shores had come to be infested with phantoms of an ill-omened sort. But in the matter of the spiders he was able to lend more practical assistance, and it became his custom to spend part of each visit in pursuing them, with the help of a heather-tipped oar-handle, to their most obscure and recondite recesses. Lizzie doubted whether "he mightn't as well be offerin' to hunt the clouds off the sky as them crathurs that kep' on patchin' up their old webs out of nothin' at all;" and Maria sometimes complained that he stirred up the dust to fly about choking them; but as the chase seemed a satisfaction to Mrs MacNee, it was persevered in until at length it brought disaster.

One evening after tea Jim was flourishing his mop with especial energy on the track of a huge spider, which his hostess had descried "leggin' it up the wall beside the turf-bin, with horns on

it's hijjis head the len'th of your arm and as black and hairy in itself as the divil's hind-foot." This prodigious object was elusively swift in its movements, and dodged about for a long while among the rafters with tantalising disappearances and reappearances, until at last Jim, making a desperate lunge, tripped over a stool and brought down his weapon with much violence on the jingling dresser. It stood so thick with crockery that the resulting damage seemed strangely slight, being limited to the fracture of a single cup. Only Jim and Lizzie witnessed the accident, Mrs MacNee having stepped into the other room bringing tea for Maria, who was laid up with asthma. "That's contráry now," said Lizzie. "Of course nothin' would suit it but to be the one our Paddy gave me mother just before he quit, and that she sets the greatest store by at all."

"Ay, ay, ay, it's too bad altogether," Jim said, standing in large disconcertion, and looking down on the small pink-and-white victim of his clumsiness.

"The worst of it is," said Lizzie, "that she'll be sure to think it's a sign of somethin' happenin' him, and fretting herself into fiddlestrings she'll be till we hear from him agin."

"I wonder now would there be e'er a chance I could match it anywhere," Jim said, ruefully examining the pink-banded cup with the piece out of its side. "It's not too oncommon a pattron."

"It wouldn't be the same thing to her as Paddy's one, even so," said Lizzie.

"Suppose it happened she didn't know the differ," said Jim.

"To be sure if I kep' the right side turned out she might maybe never notice it till you thried for the other," said Lizzie.

"Do then, like a jewel," said Jim.

"It might be the best plan," said Lizzie. "For I well know she'd have us all bothered hearin' banshees, and dreamin' ugly dreams, and sayin' it was a sign of troubles. And you might have a good chance of matchin' it at the fair there is to-morrow or next day down below."

"I will so," said Jim.

Thus the conspiracy was hatched, with what seemed a fair prospect of success. But the Fowl of Fortune never will sit upon only a single egg ; and it seldom happens that at least one of the brood does not turn out an unchancy bird.

On the next day was Haganstown Fair, at which six of the Moriarty sheep off the mountainy lands were to be sold. Andy had intended to drive them over with the help of Garry the collie and Jack ; but at the early breakfast Jim proposed to come instead of the latter. He said it was because the young chap had a heavy cold on him to be going out under the wet, and Andy said (aside to Biddy) it was because the big ass did be always stuffin' himself wherever he wasn't wanted ; but neither explanation was strictly true. And at the Fair the first acquaintance Jim fell in with was Lizzie MacNee, who for a wonder had been persuaded to accept a seat on the Duffs' side-car.

The meeting seemed a lucky event, as they both hoped that the right teacup might be found in time for Lizzie to carry it home with her. "And that," said Lizzie, "would be a great thing; for she's apt enough to take the notion of usin' it at the party to-morra night, and then where'd we be?" To-morrow was no less an occasion than Shrove Tuesday, which the MacNees were to celebrate with friends to tea. But the Duffs were in a hurry home out of the rain, and Lizzie had to go before the china-hunt had well begun. "I'll get it sure enough yet, no fear," Jim prophesied at parting. "Twill be on one of them stalls. And I brought the broken bit along, the way I mightn't be mistook in the colour." He showed her, with some pride at his own providence, the pink-and-white fragment which protruded from a pocket of his best coat.

"Don't be late bringin' it over to-morra," said Lizzie. "Of course Biddy and little Jack 'ill be comin' along—and Andy, maybe, that's too much took up wid his ould sheep to come and spake a word to anybody."

Andy, standing black-browed at a little distance, looked as if any words he might see fit to speak would be far from agreeable. He had watched the meeting of Lizzie with Jim, and through the voluble bargaining of old Joe Megarity had overheard snatches of their conversation, which he thought betokened some secret understanding between them. His impression when setting out had been that Jim was

coming to keep an eye on the sale of the sheep, lest he should be defrauded of the profits in which he owned so large a share. But now a different motive suggested itself, and shrivelled up the more sordid suspicion as a wave of flame might scorch up a muddy little puddle. As the Duffs' car drove off he withdrew scowlingly into the seclusion of a dense crowd, and for the remainder of the Fair evaded notice so completely that Jim had to return alone.

III

THE next morning, which was the last one of an inclement February, wore so murky and menacing an aspect that Biddy Moriarty decided upon walking over very early to the MacNees, lest if she waited till towards evening the threatened *polthogues* of rain should catch her in her "good things." She started in her best humour too, for Jim had just presented her with a grand blue silk scarf, and moreover, to her delighted exclamation that it was "the very same colour as the one looked so iligant on Lizzie MacNee," had replied : "Bedad now, Biddy, you'd be twice as purty a girl as any MacNee if you done your hair a trifle tidier." This qualified compliment was no more than the truth ; but compliments of any sort had so rarely been her portion that it elated her

exceedingly. Passing the turf-stack she saw Andy lounging against it, and accosted him with : "Well, Andy, do you know what Jim's after sayin' to me?" Andy, however, kicked over a zinc bucket which lay near, and growled amid its clatter : "Och, go to the mischief. What the devil do I care what the bosthoon's after sayin' to anybody?" So, inferring his mood to be unsympathetic, she huffily went her way with her news untold. Jim, who had thought of entrusting her with the surreptitious cup, which he had successfully matched, saw that she was bundle-laden, and resolved to row himself over with it at a reasonably early hour.

But by the time that it seemed late enough to set off the weather had altered seriously for the worse. Not only was the wind rising in fitful squalls, but through the nearest gap in the hills a procession of low-trailing clouds came on interminably, with the gait of winged things that chose to creep, and in a lull about noon one of these lit like an immense white moth on Beltranagh Farm, blotting out its world with blurs of blank fog. "It might take off wid itself in a couple of hours, if the wind got up agin, or it might settle down for the devil knows how long," was Andy's forecast when he came gloomily groping indoors and was rather anxiously consulted by Jim. "And what odds does it make one way or the other?"

"I was thinkin' of gettin' over to the MacNees," said Jim.

"Then you might as well be thinkin' of breakin'

your fool's neck while you're about it, steppin' into some hole—and welcome," said Andy, dumping himself down into the hearth corner. He had brought home yesterday, instead of one fairing that he had changed his mind about getting, a bottle of new whisky, and to-day's evil humour was aggravated by its contents. Jim perceived that Andy did not propose to accompany him, which was inconvenient, inasmuch as an experienced guide would have been useful, sullen or no. However, he reflected that morose society might be better than none for Jack, whose cold forbade stravading about in the chilly fog. So he tied up his teacup in a large red cotton handkerchief and went out, uncertain whether to make his way by land or by lough. This question soon seemed to be decided for him by his losing himself with a thoroughness which he would have thought impossible upon a strip of ground nowhere many perches wide. The fog pressed on him so impenetrably that he could not see a hand, much less a foot, before his face, and in skirting rough, tall boulders and crossing little creeks he lost his bearings completely and irretrievably. To and fro he circuitously strayed, until he would have abandoned his expedition in despair had not home become as unapproachable as any other place.

Then at length he stumbled against something and discovered that it was the small boat in which he had made his last voyage up the lough. She was lying as usual on the little sandy patch close to

the water, which he heard lapping unseen ; and he forthwith felt assured that his plan could be carried out after all. He generally disliked giving up a plan, and particularly wished the teacup to arrive in good time. As he faced the water a cold blast blew steadily in his back, and he said to himself : " More power to it ! That win' ill soon raise the fog, and 'twill give me a fine lift up the lough. Me arm's right enough anyhow for rowin' that far ; I needn't put up the sail while it's so thick." He launched the boat easily, with his bundle stowed carefully under a bench, and was just pushing off when somebody chuckled startlingly close by. The fog was lightening, for he could almost imagine that he saw the outline of the somebody seated on a boulder. " Is it fishin' you're a-goin' this fine evenin' ? " said Andy, and laughed derisively.

" To be sure I am, all the way up to Mrs Mac-Nee's. Are you comin' along ? " Jim replied, choosing to assume that Andy's sarcasm was amicably meant, but not by any means supposing that the invitation would be accepted. Andy in fact did reply : " Am I goin' to blazes wid me great-grandmother's cat ? " But the next moment he jumped up, saying : " Och, bedad, I might as well," and suddenly had one foot at sea.

" If you've drink taken, you'd a right to stop on shore," said Jim, to whom this infirmness of purpose looked suspicious. But Andy only said : " Drink away, boys," and swung himself on to a bench. His embarkation was immediately

followed by another, which sought, and failed to be unobserved. "What's that clattering?" said Jim. "Och to goodness is it Jack?" It was Jack, who had furtively attended Andy when he sauntered out. "Git along wid yourself home, you young rascalion," Andy said, making a grab at him, whereupon Jim shoved the child out of reach behind him into the bows. "He'd better stop as he's come," said Jim. "He might be all night findin' the house agin."

"Och, have it your own way," said Andy, with another laugh, taking an oar. Jim also began to row, not rejoicing in either of his companions.

For some time he pulled on silently and gave no signs that he was growing puzzled: their progress seemed to him so inexplicably slow. The high wind certainly was with them, yet they made little way, and as if against a strong current. The blinding white fog had thinned somewhat, and lifted, but nothing came into view except dull green water, and that was strangely turbulent. "Begorra, there's no end to it," said Jim, at last, or rather shouted, the noisy wind prescribing loud and laconic speech. "We should ha' been past the narrows long ago, but ne'er a sign of them; and its wilder the wather's gettin' on us instead of smother."

"Sure, now, yourself's the quare man," Andy shouted back. "Thinkin' to be in the town of New York by tay-time. If you get your breakfast there you'll be doin' right well."

"What at all are you romancin' about?"

"Where else are you expectin' to get it—and yourself rowin' out to say as hard as you can pelt for the last half-hour or more? We'll be off Inish Arbeen by now."

"It's a lie you're tellin'. Sure, I knew you were demented wid the drink."

"Take a sup yourself, then, boyo, of wather, and you'll aisy see if e'er a drop like it's in Lough Orren to wet Lizzie MacNee's tay," Andy yelled hoarsely, hindered by his own passion as well as the rising storm's; and Jim involuntarily obeyed the injunctions as a splash of scudding spray was slung across his face. Tasting the sharp Atlantic brine, he was convinced that Andy, drunk or sober, had spoken the truth.

"Then I turned the wrong way and you never tould me. Of all the bedlam tricks," he said. "But we must be gettin' back out of this the quickest road we can, and it's as much as we'll do." He stopped rowing and held water, so that as Andy continued to pull, the boat swung round with her broadside to a wave, which swooping by almost swamped them.

"Quit them fool's antics," commanded Andy. "We couldn't make an offer to git back agin' that win', and if we could we'd only be bet to sticks on the shingle. What we've a right to do is thry run in under the lee of Arbween Headland over yonder." He pointed across a field of mounded foam to where, on the more stable-seeming vapour, quivered a dim outline, showing the soft curves of silvery flower-petals, but in reality representing

a bastion of black rock reared above buttresses shagged with murky weed, and hung with seething white fleeces. It's our best chance," he said, "and a bad one."

"Thry anythin' you can ; I'm a land-lubber to you," said Jim. It was indeed no time for self-assertion. The wind was raving in a full gale as they began to struggle towards their refuge, awfully distant beyond whirling chasms and drifting cataracts. No conversation was possible, save the argument between the powers of the waters and the air, carried on with skirling shriek and moaning bellow. At last, in a brief pause, a human voice, small and futile, made itself heard. It was Jack, whose hitherto implicit faith in his elders' capacity for managing affairs had been shaken by the fiercer plunging and battering, and who now inquired breathlessly : " Is there e'er a chance—of us goin' down—the way the Mulhalls' boat done wid them before Christmas? "

"The divil recaive the chance there is of any such a thing, sonny, sorra a one at all," said Jim, with a vivid recollection of how he had decreed the child's fate. "Take the cup out of the handkerchief there beside you, avic—'twould ha' been in smithereens if you hadn't kep' a hold on it—and bale away wid it like a Trojan." He set Jack this task as he might have blindfolded a frightened horse. But when Andy saw the cup unwrapped, his eyes glared in the black and white of his drawn face. "It's not drinkin' tay out of that Lizzie MacNee 'ill be this night, nor e'er

another night she won't be, I'm thinkin', for all the fine hurry you were in takin' off wid it to her," he said triumphantly.

"What blatherin' have you about Lizzie MacNee?" Jim answered. "'Twas a cup I was bringin' her mother in place of one I broke on her."

"And I didn't see you colloquin' wid Lizzie yisterday at the Fair, and she so took up wid you she couldn't look the way anybody else was?"

"Lizzie MacNee's nothin' to me, alive or dead, or meself to Lizzie, there's the whole of it. And that's what you've dhrownded the three of us for—you mad devil."

"We're not dhrownded yit. Forby, how could I tell it was goin' to blow a gale?" Andy rejoined half apologetically, after one more hopeless wrestle. "It's just a quare bit of bad luck all round. Faix, there's an end of that anyway." For at this moment the cup, slipping from Jack's hand, broke in two. The mishap made him look up with an apprehensiveness that in the circumstances struck Jim as singularly piteous. "Never mind, Jack, me man," he hastened to say, "sure what matter at all? 'Twas the unlucky ould cup, and we'll do as well widout it every atom." He was thinking to himself: "If I could be sartin 'twas an aisier way than dhrowndin', I'd knock him on the head wid the oar—I would so."

Andy spoke his thoughts aloud: "I hope Biddy'll be stoppin' the night at the MacNees."

What I do be thinkin' worst of is her comin' home, the crathur, to the empty house. She and Lizzie was great friends ever ; Lizzie 'ud be very apt to keep her." For further reflections they had no time. A vast wave, sweeping along to hurl itself against the cliffs, was caught and swirled round close by in a boiling crater, whence it broke forth through a flurry of smotherin' foam, and rising higher and higher poised itself over the huddled heads in the little boat. Another instant and it fell sheer upon them, as a rearing horse falls back to crush his rider.

At this time, which was about sunset, the MacNees, in their fire-lit kitchen away at the head of the lough, made up their minds that it would be ridiculous to expect any guests on such a wild wet evening, and had begun to prepare tea. "Your brothers might be lookin' in a bit later, when the win' goes down," Lizzie said to Biddy. "I wouldn't wonder if Jim did anyway."

"If they'd be ruled by me they'd keep off the lough after dark," said Mrs MacNee. "The dear knows what else might be out and about on it this minyit."

"Ah, sure, they'll do well enough so long as they meet nothin' worse than mother's ould ghosts," said Lizzie.

"They'll maybe have little Jack along wid them," said Maria. "And a child's a grand thing, folk say, for keepin' away any such. We mustn't forget the sugar-sticks we have for him."

"Yis, mother, I'm just puttin' out the common cups," said Lizzie. "What need is there to be usin' Paddy's good one when nobody—"

"Whisht," Biddy interrupted, "isn't that them outside?" She listened for a moment, and then : "I thought I heard Andy's voice callin'," she said, "but it must ha' been only the howlin' win'."

CRAZY MICK

"So them half-dozen big giants," said Felix the Thatcher, "did be drinkin' off their cups of tay, as plisant as anythin', sittin' over yonder fornint us, every one of them cocked up on his own bit of a hill." Felix pointed across the small round valley to a concave hill-line, which does show six more or less distinct summits. "And if they did, some fine evenin' a one of them took and slung the grounds at the bottom of his cup slap down there into the middle of the grassland, and you may see them lyin' on it to this day." The end of Felix's reaping-hook dropped till it quivered at a black patch that occupied a large space in the middle of the level green floor below, and spread with splash-like streaks towards the slopes surrounding. Amongst them a few white dots were scattered, gleaming clearly, and to these Felix referred as he continued, in an unmistakable tone of self-quotation: "Bedad now, I'm thinkin' he must ha' chucked out two or three grains of lump-sugar along wid them. I wonder they're not melted agin now—unless it's breadcrumbs they were."

"You might wonder anybody wasn't tired

tryin' to get a livin' on a wet bog, and there'd be some sinse in it, begor," Dinny Colman, who rented one of the white cabins, interpolated, rather resentfully matter-of-fact; but Felix finished his conceit perseveringly. "Bad luck to the big bosthoon. Why couldn't he have the wit to sling th' ould tay leaves over his shoulder into the lough, or into the say beyant, where they'd make no differ, instead of to be destroyin' the bit of good land on us? He'd little to do, let me tell him."

Felix the Thatcher was also, though not by trade, a *shanachie*, or story-teller of some renown in his district, and he had now produced the favourite local legend of the giants' tea-party, ostensibly for the information of Larry Dowdall, a new-comer, but principally for the entertainment of four gossoons, who listened with unjaded interest. They, with their three elders, were sitting on a furzy bank at the foot of a very steep oat-field, which the men had been reaping all the forenoon, while the boys did such odd jobs as their size and wits permitted. Now, just as Felix had finished accounting for the existence of the black bog, another object that seemed to demand explanation presented itself — a figure moving along the lane, which at a lower level girdles the hillside. It was a tall, elderly man, in a long, ragged cotamore and battered caubeen, who walked slowly and stoopingly, with down-bent eyes, apparently talking to himself.

"Here's Crazy Mick trapesin' along," said Patsy Colman, "Himself and his little brat."

"If he's been till now gettin' here from Foynish, he's took his time," said Patsy's father, "for I seen him halfway afore breakfast."

"Sure he does be stoppin' continual to rest the little *girsheach*, goodness help him," said Felix.

"What's he lookin' for all the while?" said Larry Dowdall, as they watched Crazy Mick's progress, intermittently visible between the high banks of the winding boreen. "He's peerin' down before him as if he had the notion he was walkin' after a lost shillin'."

"Och, that's not his notion at all," said Felix, "it's discoorsin' he consaits he is to a little girl he owned one time—she's dead this twinty year and more, herself, and the mother, and another child; they all died on him in the fever widin a couple of days, and he's wrong in his head ever since. But his belief is that he's got Peg along wid him yet. It's her he's havin' the talk wid there this minyit, you may dipind—and she in her clay maybe before you were born—and walkin' slow he does be to humour her, or whiles carryin' of her about."

"If you pelt a lump of a stone, or a sod of turf, or anythin' at him," said Art Fitzsimon, the biggest gossoon, "he'll be grabbin' her up in his arms like, and lettin' on to hide her away under his ould coat, and bawlin' and cursin'. It's as funny as anythin' you ever seen. When he comes past here I'll show you."

"If you offer to do any such a thing I'll clout

your head," Dinny Colman said, and poked him preliminarily with the disapproving toe of a heavy brogue. Art wriggled out of reach ; but after all there was no opportunity for executing his purpose, as Crazy Mick turned off down a by-path before he came to where the lane ran beneath the party on that bank.

Crazy Mick did not go very far, only just out of sight round the spur of the hill that marks an entrance to another little valley holding a narrow water, more like a short length of river than a lough. He knew that countryside well, as he had tramped about it for the last quarter of a century almost, so that his recurring calls were quite an institution in the district, and the inhabitants of its scattered dwellings would have found their situation all the lonelier if "the crathur" had ceased to look in on them for a bit and sup, or a taste of the hearth-fire. They had learned to take it as a matter of course that he should insist upon sharing all these things with an invisible Peg, and they humoured his fancy as best they could. Experiments such as that proposed by Art Fitzsimon were strenuously discouraged, and Mick was seldom molested. He was very harmless, well-meaning, indeed, though generally self-absorbed, like one in a half-dream. Danger threatened to Peg alone could stir his wrath. The people, a diminishing number, who recollected him before his troubles, used to say that he had been always a trifle soft, but as good-natured a poor boy as you'd meet between the Seven Seas. Nobody could tell

exactly how his hallucinations had begun. It was only known that for several days following his wife's and children's funeral he had been seen to sit "quiet and moidhered like" among the tall nettle-clumps in Kilanure burial-ground by the lough, and then for some weeks had disappeared. When he returned it soon became evident that he believed himself to have recovered his three-year-old Peg, and that he was in quest of Herself and the baby Dan, whom he expected to find in the little house where, only last spring, he had had all his wealth and pelf gathered in one glow by the flickering turf-sods, while fate and death had seemed as remote as the dim mid-day moon.

These two delusions were the source of all his solace and the cause of all his misery, the first comforting his days, and the second bringing him bitter disappointment almost every night. For dusk seldom closed in but a light gleaming from some cottage window filled him with an idle hope of what was farther beyond his reach than the evening star. It was at sun-setting that his expectation grew strongest, because the hour had been wont to bring him home from his work, when work and home were his. More than once he went back to his old tumble-down cabin, but seeing it empty of familiar faces, he declared it to be "the wrong place he was after comin' to," and continued his search without mistrust of ultimate success.

Though he might have had lodging for the asking among his neighbours, he did not wish to

be shut up indoors. Faces and voices that were strange, or at least *other* to him, saddened and bewildered him, so that if possible he would sleep out under ricks and hedges and banks ; he said that Peg liked to be looking up at the stars. But in wet and cold weather he was obliged, on her account, to accept with reluctance the offer of bed as well as board.

A rain-storm had driven him to do so on the night before this September afternoon, and the consequence was that his sleep had been broken and scanty. Therefore now, when he sat down in the shade of a hawthorn bush on the sloping shore of the lough, a drowsiness crept swiftly over him and he was soon fast asleep. His slumber lasted for hours, and it was not far from sunset when something suddenly roused him. It was a voice and a laugh from a little further up the hill-side, along which the reapers were going home. "There's himself and his Peg," Art Fitzsimon was saying.

Crazy Mick started up half awake, and walked round the bush into the brightness of the long sunbeams, which were slanting across the lough. The sun had dropped low into the gap between two purple pyramids, and his rays on the smooth water had woven a strip of matting, as if with a skein of fiery golden thread. It was like a carpet for some wonderful sort of footpath, he thought, blinking at it with sleepy eyes, and he said so to Peg. But immediately afterwards he blamed himself for putting such a notion into her head ; it might encourage her to run into the water some

day, which would be a terrible thing entirely. And then, all in a moment, with the swift shifting of a dream, he began to see that terrible thing actually come to pass. Peg darted away from him and raced down to the edge. He made a rush, too late to stop her, and in an instant was floundering helplessly out of his depth.

Larry Dowdall was just in time to plunge in and rescue him, with no small peril from the blind "drowning grip"; but then Larry and the two other men needed all their strength to keep him from struggling back into the lough, where he averred that his little girl was being drowned dead.

At nightfall they brought him, exhausted and passive, to the District Asylum, for which he was clearly a suitable case, as he had been seen to throw himself into the water, and his looks and words bespoke unreason. However, he did not rebel against captivity. With Peg had gone all his business and desire. He did not even wish to meet his wife and little Dan now. Herself would think too bad, he said, of his losing Peg. And after moping for a while, one morning he turned his disconsolate face to the wall and unwittingly went perhaps the very way he had been in search of so long.





WIDOW FARRELL'S WONDERFUL AGE

I

CLOCHRANBEG, the tiny Donegal town, half of which, on the brink of its tall sea-cliff, stands overlooking its other half, set low on the shore, is a place whither we may return after a lapse of years to find not only everything but everybody very much as we left them. And though this is partly because many of the children, whose growth would have been perplexing, will unfortunately have emigrated, it is partly, too, because many of their elders wear so well and change so slowly.

Not that Clochranbeg is a Tir-na-n-og such as one lights on now and then in the soft south, where brows remain strangely unwrinkled by passing Time's inscriptions. Here in the bleak north, face to face with the roughest weather, we seldom find, as did of yore the Northumbrian king, "beauty that blooms when youth is gone," and the inhabitants have to be satisfied with vigour and energy continuing unusually long after visages are tanned and furrowed. What they do pride themselves on considerably is the

hale old age to which they often attain, and which those of the upper town account for by the airiness of their situation, subject to every wind that blows, whether across the boundless Atlantic or the wide Meenaclochran bog-lands; whereas their neighbours in the lower town ascribe it in their case to the splendid shelter, from all save western storms, enjoyed by them at the foot of the high cliff.

"Sure now, it's ourselves gets our plenty of the fresh air, one way or the other," boasts Jim Doyle. "If we had everythin' else accordin', we'd be the very rich people entirely;" and he sticks to his opinion even while flakes of his thatch are flying all abroad upon the blast. But Hughey M'Evoy wouldn't take a shilling a day to live cocked up there like a windmill bewitched, and he does not abate his terms, though a wild night may bestrew his roof with sea-wrack and fling salt spray hissing upon his hearth-stone. Both, however, agree that there are few places where people are apt to be getting their health as well as at Clochranbeg.

So it is easy to understand what jealous feelings would be roused by an incident which occurred one summer not very long since at Stradowan, a village several miles inland, away beyond the big bog. The hundredth birthday of one Mrs Julia O'Meara had there been celebrated "with every sort of grandeur you could give a name to," including an entertainment at the school-house, and a presentation of sundry garments and

groceries, organised by Mr Felix Reilly of the parish shop. Highly-coloured accounts of the proceedings had been spread around at fairs and markets, but, more than that, the affair had actually got into the newspaper, being made the subject of a paragraph in the *Northern Trumpeter*, wherein to details of the ceremony were appended some remarks on the salubriousness of Stradrowan as evidenced by its possession of so hale and hearty a resident centenarian.

In these lurked a sting which moved the Clochranbegians to indignant murmurs about people who thought themselves very fine with their names on the paper; people who were mighty fond of flourishing themselves to the front, and other reprehensible members of society. Mrs Pat Doherty, being "something to" the Stradrowan Reillys, had gone so far as to purchase at Loughmore, twelve miles distant, that copy of the *Trumpeter*; and when a fortnight old it was still much in request among her acquaintances. Two of them, in fact, were busy with it one warm afternoon when the Widow Farrell looked in on her way to Geary's.

The Widow Farrell had been living quite alone on a potato-patch in a recess of the sea-cliff ever since most people could remember, though her youth had passed before she came to Clochranbeg. She was one of the Carmodys, whose habitation had been on the townland of Moyloughlin, towards Kilanure, but of whom none now remained on that countryside. At Clochranbeg she had no

one belonging to her more particularly than by the vague and intricate cousinships, the tracing and recognising of which may be regarded as a matter of kindness rather than of kindred. Undoubtedly there was nothing in the widow's circumstances that could tempt anyone to claim affinity with her from interested motives ; for her position was as precarious as humble, resting upon the success of her efforts to raise potatoes enough for herself and her few hens, while the utmost she hoped from the future was that "whenever anythin' bad took her it might be for good and all," by which phrase she meant to express a wish that no lingering illness should bring her ignominiously to the Union Infirmary. At this time, however, she was still a brisk and active little old woman, who could patter about the deep-sanded boreens with her piled-up creel of turf sods as nimbly as a goat, when "Pather Phelan would be buildin' her her stack."

It was a much lighter load she had now as she came blinking out of the July sunshine into Mrs Doherty's house, perched on the rim of the cliff at the northern end of the straggling street, which forms the higher Town. "Sit ye down, ma'am ; is it kilt you are wid the heat?" Mrs Doherty said, hospitably starting up from her end of the fireside form so abruptly that Nannie Phelan was all but tossed off the other.

"Sorra bit, ma'am, am I," said Mrs Farrell, sitting down quickly, nevertheless, to restore the balance. "It's a grand, blazin' hot day, glory be to

goodness. Just steppin' along to Geary's I am wid me eggs for some oatenmale."

"Poor Mr Geary, he's none too well plased wid the way they're settin' themselves up over at Stradrowan," said Nannie Phelan. "Says I to him the other day: 'Well, Mr Geary,' says I, 'Mr Faylix Reilly over yonder's the great man altogether these times, himself and his prisentations,' says I. And says he to me: 'Ah sure, it's all in the way of business, that's what it is,' says he, as much as to make out the same might happen himself any time at all. So he passed it off wid the form of a laugh, but if he wasn't more than a little put out I haven't an eye in me head. He never happint to look at the *Trumpeier* he said. Och, Mrs Hickey, it's yourself has the strong sight, to be readin' that quare small little print."

"Plain enough it is," Mrs Hickey replied from her stool at Nannie's elbow; "the only thing that bothers one is how at all they contrived to reckon up the ould crathur's age that exact; for 'twould be much if anybody had a notion of it after such a len'th of time, supposin' 'twas ever in their knowledge. Bedad now, ma'am, if you axed me how ould I was this minyit, that haven't the sign of a grey hair on me head, you'd ax me more than I could be tellin' you. Why, one does be losin' count of the childer's ages, once they're over three or four year. It's somethin' aisier wid the bastes, because one does be keepin' them mostly a shorter while. But if you owned a pig or a

heifer for fifty or sixty year, you'd be very apt to disremember what sort of an age was on it before you got shut of it."

"You would so," said Mrs Doherty. "But bastes is a different thing. You can't be countin' up their ages conformably to what cows and pigs might have a recollection of, as if they were Christians. And that's the way they manage wid them oncommon ould-aged people."

"Ay do they, thrue for you," said Mrs Hickey. "*The vener'ble re-ciperant of the prisentation retains a vy-vid remimberance of the fateful year '98, the landin' of the Frinch, the battle of Watherloo, and other historiogical evints, which she grapically relates to her interésted audithors,*" she spelled slowly out of the smudgy column. "But sure there's plenty here in Clochranbeg could remimber that much, and maybe more, if they gave their minds to it."

"What 'ud ail them to not?" said Nannie Phelan. "I've a good few things in me own recollection, and as for Mrs Farrell, that has a heavier age on her than any of us here, ma'am, she had a right to remimber all manner. But there's no talk of presintin' her wid shawls and gowns and chests of tay."

"Ah, not at all, not at all, why would they?" the widow said disclaimingly. "I'm a dale short of a hunderd yet anyway."

"Might you happen to mind any talk of the war and the Frinch landin', ma'am?" Mrs Hickey inquired of her.

"Sure I'm hearin' talk of it all the days of me life, for that matter," Mrs Farrell said. "But the war I've the most recollection of was an American one, for it lasted a cruel long while, and the prices there did be on everythin' would frighten you. A shillin' for a little weeny taste of tay you could put in a half egg-shell. Sorra a sup of it any poor person seen those times, and everybody said 'twas the American war made it so dear."

"A drop of tay's a woeful loss," Mrs Doherty said. "There's nothin' to aqil it. But how long back might that be, Mrs Farrell?"

"Och, woman dear, I couldn't be tellin' you! It was a good while bedad. Only I remimber as if it was yisterday, Mr Geary's grandfather sayin' to me 'twas the war in America riz up the price of the tay."

"Mr Martin here can tell us very belike," Mrs Hickey said, wheeling her stool half round so as to reach a small elderly man, who was sitting just behind it at the window, and reading the other sheet of the *Trumpeter*. He was the National School teacher of Clochranbeg. "Mr Martin," Mrs Hickey shouted in his deaf ear, twitching him by the sleeve out of his leading article.

"Public opinion—troth, if that's what all they're trustin' to," Mr Martin said, as if she had jerked off what lay uppermost in his mind at the moment.

"Och, no matter for that," she said. "I was axin' you could you tell us what American war

there might be a great while ago had somethin' to say to the price of tay."

"Oh, ay to be sure," said Mr Martin, "that 'ud be at the beginnin' end of the War of Independance—the time a mob of people dressed themselves up like wild Injins and stepped on board of all the ships that was lyin' in Boston Harbour loaded wid tay, and every bit of it they slung into the water—hundreds of tons' weight."

"Wisha, wisha," deplored Mrs Doherty. "Themselves was the lads to go do such a mischievous thing, and to be sure that 'ud make it terrible scarce and dear. It's grew in them parts, I should suppose. But how long would it be since then, Mr Martin?"

"'Twould be before any of us was born or thought of," said Mr Martin. "I couldn't give you the very date out of me head extemporaneous, but 'twas a dozen year or so after George the Third come by the crown of England. If you called it seventeen hundred and seventy you wouldn't be far astray." And he hurried back to his leader.

"Siventeen hundred and siventy," said Mrs Doherty. "Isn't that ould ages ago?"

Nannie Phelan was adding up on her fingers under her breath. "Tin and tin is twinty, and tin is thirty," and at the end of her calculations she said: "I declare to goodness it's better than a hunderd year, forby whatever age she was herself at the time. Is it just a slip of a *girsheach* you were then, ma'am?"

"Deed no, Nannie ; a widow woman I was then, the very same way I am now," Mrs Farrell said, glancing anxiously from face to face. Her three neighbours were surveying her with a sort of awe-stricken curiosity, which was not reassuring.

"Well to be sure," said Mrs Hickey, "she looked to be an ould woman when I come here first, and that's over twinty year back ; but I'd no notion she was that wonderful age altogether."

"Tellin' you the truth, I was noticin' her failed a dale this good little bit," said Mrs Doherty. "But that's only to be expected, the dear knows, and she goin' on for two hunderd."

"What way are you feelin' yourself at all, ma'am dear?" said Nannie.

"I do be gettin' me health very reasonable," Mrs Farrell said, "glory be to goodness." But her tone was dejected enough to harmonise with the condolence expressed in Nannie's inquiry.

"I wonder now might she happen to have e'er a line wrote down anywheres?" said Mrs Hickey. "That's sometimes a handy way of makin' out things."

"There's a little ould prayer-book I have at home this long while," said the widow, "and I remimber me poor father sayin' me own name was on a leaf of it. I scarce think there's aught else. I niver got any learnin' to spake of, for I come away from school to help in the house after me sisther—" Mrs Farrell stopped herself suddenly,

for she was just stumbling on a bit of family history which she always avoided with care.

"She's fit to drop wid draggin' herself up the steep hill, that's what ails her," pronounced Mrs Doherty. "I'll be wettin' her a cup of tay. It's much if the crathur overs next winter," she added in a loud aside to Nannie Phelan.

"I met Pather Doyle and I comin' along here, and he said I was lookin' grand," Mrs Farrell put in wistfully.

"Ah, sure, Pather's a great talker. If he says a word of truth, of an odd time, it's mostly because he consaits in his own mind it's a lie he's tellin' you," said Mrs Doherty.

"But don't be frettin', ma'am," said Nannie Phelan, "you might do finely yet a while. Buryin' the half of us you might be. And I'll slip over meself now wid your basket to Geary's, and fetch you what you was wantin', the way you needn't be killin' yourself trampin' about. So just sit aisy where you are."

Nannie would not be gainsaid, but bustled off, eager to communicate their remarkable chronological discovery, and to carry out a benevolent plan of her own. It's result appeared when she returned after half an hour's gossip and presented to the widow a small, peaked blue paper parcel.

"'Tis just a grain, ma'am, I got you meself; and your oatenmale's all right in the basket, wid an egg to your credit. Ah, sure, not at all, don't say a word. 'Deed now, it's a poor case if the ouldst ould woman in the country couldn't make

herself a cup of tay. When I tould Mr Geary he said 'twas a couple of ould-age pinsions you had a right to be gettin'."

"Offerin' to make her a prisint of them he'd be, if only he kep' them in stock, he would so. Musha, long life to himself," Mrs Hickey remarked with sarcasm.

The gift made Mrs Farrell very grateful, but failed to raise her spirits, which had sunk low as she sat perplexed, sipping out of Mrs Doherty's ponderous blue-rimmed cup; and she soon got up, saying it was time she stepped home. Her hostess, though declaring it would be a sin to ask her to stay late, and perhaps catch her death of cold, protested against letting her go by herself and carry down the basket, which she had carried up without a thought, and Nannie Phelan, putting her head out of the door, espied a long-legged, bare-footed little niece trotting by, and bade her come to take home Mrs Farrell's basket. So the widow set off, escorted by Katty M'Cann.

It seemed to Mrs Farrell that the lane was unwontedly steep, and that never before had she waded so wearily through the deep sand. Twice she had to bid Katty not "be tatterin' along at such a rate, fit to jig the breath out of a body." As they went between the silvery banks, which took lilac and amber hues in the sunset shine and shadow, she was groping among her memories for some way of creeping out from under the huge burden of years so suddenly heaped upon her by the computations of her friends.

"I was growin' an ould woman, I well knew," she reflected, "but what they say's beyond the beyonds entirely. I never heard tell of any of the Carmodys livin' to one hundred, let alone a couple, nor yet anybody belongin' to me poor mother aither. People 'ill be wonderin' what's keepin' me in it so long. Onnathural it is."

Yet she could find no escape from their conclusions. The years that had passed since her early widowhood lay behind her all in a dim mist of monotony, confusingly alike, without any notable events for time-marks. Whatever things she did remember distinctly and consecutively belonged, she knew, to the far-off days before the loss of her elder sister and her own short married life. In the featureless blur of shifting summers and winters it was impossible to fix dates for isolated reminiscences such as the dear tea and the American war; ten years, or twenty, or forty might have elapsed between them. That old prayer-book, the legacy of her father's brother, alone afforded hopes of a clue, and so impatient was she to follow it up that when she reached her door she bade Katty wait a minute till she fetched out something she wanted read. Katty, tilting the damp-embrowned page to catch the slanted sunbeams, spelt off the fly-leaf, "Norah Carmody."

"Sure enough, you've got it right, that's me name," said Mrs Farrell. "But would you try is there any figures on it, honey?"

"Sivinteen hundred and sixty-two there is,"

said Katty, peering closer at the faded ink. "That's a quare long while ago."

"It is so, God knows," Mrs Farrell said, relinquishing her last hope. "And it stands to raison nobody'd take and write down me name before I was born. Thank you kindly, Katty."

As she turned indoors she felt the new, unaccustomed weight of that great old age pressing sadly on both body and mind, and she dropped her basket on the floor and sat down forlorn by the smouldering wraith of a fire. She had not the heart to think even of Nannie Phelan's tea, which in any ordinary circumstances would have given the evening a cheerful flavour ; it seemed such a lonesome fate to be the ouldest ould woman in Ireland.

II

It was early in July when her neighbours discovered the Widow Farrell's wonderful age, and three months later found her beginning almost to look the character of a bi-centenarian, so bent, wizened and decrepit had she grown. Not that anything definite ailed her : the change was wrought partly by her own melancholy imaginations, and partly by other people's alarming speeches. She told herself that she needn't expect to have the use of her limbs any while longer, and everybody she met told her how surprising it was to see her able to be going about at all ; and the consequence was that she daily

felt herself becoming more feeble and incapable. On Sunday mornings she sometimes cheered up a bit, because she could not help feeling flattered by all the attention she received as she climbed the steep boreen to Mass, among a troop of sympathetic acquaintances, who contended with one another for the privilege of offering so distinguished a personage an arm. But even then she heard and overheard many observations which, however kindly meant, were by no means encouraging, and through the long week, when she lacked any such excitement, she sat brooding and moping, until her strength waned with her spirits. Out of doors she seldom stirred.

One mild autumn afternoon, however, the mellow golden light tempted her to lift her old shawl over her head and creep as far as the John Phelans, who lived close by, just across a loop of smooth firm sand at the mouth of a boreen. Down this a stream of people had been wending on their way back from Rathcroskery fair, and as several of them had turned into the Phelans' kitchen, the widow arrived amid quite a large party of neighbours. Nannie Phelan, maiden sister to the man of the house, welcomed her kindly, and sat down with her in a quiet corner, noticing that the old woman looked what she would have described as "skeery and desolite like."

"Sure, I dunno is there one thing amiss wid me more than the other," Mrs Farrell explained lugubriously, "only I was dramin' all last night

a dale about the little round musheroons we did be gettin' in the fields at home, and they made me think of me sisther Rose, that had an oncommon fancy for them ever. I'd bring her any ones I could find, and she'd be puttin' them in among the hot ashes for to broil. I mind the smell of them this minyit, and she pokin' them out wid a bit of stick, and sittin' cocked up on the end of th' ould settle a-nibblin' of them, the crathur, like a wild rabbit wid a weeny white turnip stole for itself. I'm thinkin' it's maybe a sort of sign."

"She's away this great while, I should suppose? The Lord be good to her," Nannie said with interest. It was a new departure for Mrs Farrell to mention this long-vanished elder sister, of whose very existence many of her friends had never heard.

"Ay is she that," she replied to Nannie, "for what else would she be after all this while? And Christy Dann as well—the back of me hand to him; nobody thought anythin' of them Danns. But sorra tale or tidings ever I got of what become of her since then. I dunno if any of them did at home, and I question would they let on to me even so, they were that mad about it all. Many's the time I would be frettin' and wonderin', for I always had a great wish for poor Rose ever since I was no size to spake of. As pretty as anythin' she was, and rael good-nathured. 'Twas twinty-siven pities—But sure it was to be, and belike it's all one now which of them she took."

"What happint her, ma'am?" Nannie inquired eagerly; but before she could be answered

the open door all at once admitted sounds of such shouting and clattering and trampling that curiosity about the immediate present expelled curiosity about the remoter past, and she rushed out like the rest to see what was going on.

Everybody considered that if Joe Mulcahy had not taken more than was good for him he would never have trotted his horse and car down the steep and deep-rutted boreen; and nobody thought it otherwise than very natural that the result of his rashness was an upset at the foot of the hill. The horse tripped, and Joe and his two fares were pitched off. But they all fell softly, and only the harness was damaged. While it was a-mending with fishing-line the stranger passengers were invited to take a seat at the Phelans' fire, the circle round which was thus enlarged by the addition of a middle-aged, black-bearded gentleman in light grey, and a little girl in navy blue with a curly-feathered hat.

Elderly Terence Lalor from Moyloughlin, who was visiting his married sister, Mrs Phelan, undertook, as the person of most consequence present, to entertain the new-comer, whose "furrinness" appeared plainly in his accent, even before he remarked, in the course of conversation, that he had had little experience of side-cars, as they were pretty considerable scarce on the streets of New York City, which he had but lately left.

"They're the quare ould awkward yokes, bedad," Terence asserted with polite self-depreciation. "'Tis only in a poor, backward counthry

people would be bothered usin' them at all. We ourselves has to make a shift wid them to be gettin' to fairs and funerals and such. Deed now I mind the big loads there did be on our ould rattlethrap at home of a Sunday mornin', drivin' over to Mass at Cranmore; and, by the same token, I mind me poor mother had a sayin' that a jaunтин'-car was a terrible secret-thrap. For, says she, the people sittin' back to back on the two sates might be talkin' away about diff'rint things, widout a notion that e'er a word 'ud get across the well from one side to the other. But then maybe all of a suddint the horse 'ud come to a stand, or throt over a soft place, where there wasn't a sound of his feet or the wheels, and wid that every word they were sayin' 'ud rise up clear on the air, before they could stop themselves spakin' loud, like as if they intinded it for the whole of Ireland. Begob, I knew that to happen meself before now. But most whiles, when you're peltin' along the hard road, you couldn't tell what anybody might be sayin' or doin' on the far side, more especially if there was e'er a big box, or a couple of sacks, or anythin' sizeable, sittin' stuck up between yous on the well. There's a story I'm hearin' all the days of me life shows the truth of that same, sir; and morebetoken you was passin' the very place it happint to-day, drivin' over here from Moyloughlin, as you was a-sayin'."

"So we did, sir," said the stranger, "and I seldom ran across a lonelier-looking prospect than you have lyin' around most of the way."

"Well, sir," said Terence, "it was before me own recollection altogether, but I wisht I had a pound-note for every time I heard tell of it. 'Twas when the Carmodys of Moyloughlin, very respectable, dacint people, that are all gone now, were after makin' up a match for the eldest daughter wid a strong farmer of the name of Lawrence M'Nelis, that owned a good bit of land, and was a warm man. But this Rose Carmody couldn't abide the thoughts of him at all. The work of the world they had gettin' her persuaded, and in the end nothin' 'ud suit her but she'd be married away over at Carrick, where her grandmother lived. So to satisfy her they settled it that way, and the day before the weddin' she and her father set off drivin' to Carrick on their car, wid herself on the one side and a big box of new clothes beside her, and her father on the other sate, and the well between them piled up high wid a cartload of things belongin' to Rose that they were bringin' over. Well and good, sir, they come as far as a cross-roads you might remimber, where the Carrick road turns off the bog, and there's a collection of quare big lumps of boulder-stones scattered just in the corner. And thereabouts ould Carmody and the driver seen another car standin' a bit down the Kilanure road wid nobody mindin' it; so they passed the remark that that was no way to be lavin' it; and that was all they noticed then. But when they got to Carrick, sorra a bit of Rose was on the car, and sight nor light they ever seen of the girl agin.

For what did she do, if you please, but took and slipped herself off unbeknownst there at the cross corner, where Christy Dann was waitin' for her, lurkin' behind the big stones—a young rapscaillon widout a brass bawbee to his name that she took a fancy to—and away wid the pair of them to the States before man or baste could purvint it. Finely distracted her people were, that's sartin. But what become of her nobody knows from that good day to this—Any more than I know what the mischief you're riefin' the sleeve out of me coat for, Kate. Is it wantin' anythin' you are?"

"If you had aught better than a pair of ould owl's eyes in the ass's head of you, 'tisn't makin' a fool of yourself you'd be tellin' stories agin the Carmody's and ould Widdy Farrell sittin' fornint you listenin' to the whole of it," his sister remonstrated in an indignant whisper.

But his attention, and indeed everybody else's, was diverted to the American gentleman, who had jumped up and stood facing the semi-circle of neighbours with an air of no small importance and excitement.

"I'll tell you what's become of her, sir—you and all your friends," he said. "She's alive and well this day in her son's house on Congress Avenue, Corneliusville, the widow of a highly-respected citizen, and the grandmother of myself, Christopher P. Dann. I was named for my paternal grandfather. Yes, sir, he mayn't have been very flush of cash at the time when he

carried off Rose Carmody from the folk who were for buying, and selling, and breaking her heart among them all, but he made his pile out West, and left a good business to his children and his children's children. Often she's told me how she slithered off the car and crawled on her hands and knees through the furze bushes, afraid of her life that her father might look behind him before she got to the shelter of the big stones. And she's never regretted it, she claims, not for half-an-hour. But now I'll trouble you to present me to the Widow Farrell that good lady mentioned, for it was to look her up that I've driven over from Moyloughlin, where I called at the Carmody house and could get no information relating to any member of the family, except the Widow Farrell of Clochranbeg—my great-aunt Norah, I take it, born Carmody."

"Well I declare to goodness if that doesn't bate anythin' ever was! And here's Mrs Farrell herself—step along, woman alive," Nannie Phelan said, pushing forward the widow.

"Musha then, you done well, sir, to not be delayin' any longer, if that's what you're after," said Matt Caffrey. "When a body comes to be goin' on for a couple of hunderd year ould it stands to raison them that's intendin' to visit her has a right to set their best foot foremost."

"Indeed it's a very ould, ould crathur I am, sir," the widow said in her tremulous high piping; "a hunderd and fifty year's a quare great age for a lone widdy woman to be lastin' to, wid ne'er a

one left in this world. And it's true for them that I'm apt to quit very prisently. Sure I'm scarce able to stand on me two feet these times, let alone walkin'. But what talk have you about me sister, Rose Carmody. Och, but that was the notorious young villin to entice her away from us. How-an-e'er, it's oulder agin than meself she was, and in her clay she is this many a long year, God save us all ; ay is she, for sure."

"You're wrong there, ma'am," said Mr Christopher Dann, beginning to shake hands with her vigorously. "As I stated, she's alive and well ; has never had a day's sickness since I knew her, and that's over forty years. But as for the advanced age you claim, Aunt Norah, you're mistaken there again ; you put it at too large a figure by a very long chalk. Why, it's some seventy odd years since my grandfather and grandmother Dann crossed the fish-pond, and she says she left the sister Norah, that she's talking about all the time, only a little slip of a girl of ten or eleven. So if you're eighty-five, ma'am, this day, it's the very most you can total up to. Grandmother Dann herself's something just short of ninety, and a fine woman still. If you'll excuse the remark, I think she's better preserved than yourself—fresher and robuster looking. But there's considerable of a family likeness all the same. Rosette, come here and tell me whether this old lady reminds you of anyone at home."

The little girl, who seemed to be about seven

years old, came and stared hard for a moment with very large dark blue eyes, which were overcast occasionally by a drift of soft black hair. "Why, certainly," she said with confidence, "if she had a red shawl, and not such wide ruffles to her cap, she'd be a little like great-grandma Dann."

"That's so. What Miss Rosette Dann misses seeing correctly don't amount to a lot," her father said with pride. "But, talking of the shawl, don't you feel like fetching it out of the strap on the brown handbag over there by the door?"

As Rosette ran off Mrs Farrell said : "Woman dear, I give you me word she's the livin' moral of me sishter ; the very eyes of her, and the toss of her head to keep the hair out of them. Me brothers would be sayin' : 'Way there, Captain,' to her, and biddin' her stand steady, lettin' on 'twas our ould plough-horse she was like. Well now, to think of me behouldin' such a thing, and gettin' news of Rose, after all the frettin' I had and wonderin' what was become of her, and if it's drownded she was crossin' over the water, or starved dead maybe rovin' about the world wid that young miscreant—beggin' your pardon, sir, if he was somethin' to you, but it's dog's abuse we did always be givin' Christy Dann. And so Rose is all this while livin' grand in the States, and no such outlandish ages on the two of us whatever. They had me torminted here, sir, addin' up this way and that way till they found

out I'm the ouldest ever was. Scarce the heart I'd have to be as much as throwin' their bit of food to me poor hins, when I'd be thinkin' of the show I was makin' of meself livin' that onnathural len'th of time. But now—it's as surprisin' as can be."

Yet she considered it a degree more surprising a moment afterwards when Rosette returned with an ample shawl overflowing her short arms, and was helped by her father to wrap her great-grand-aunt in the soft, scarlet cashmere folds. They made of the little old woman an object more brilliant than the red sods' glimmer through the dusky room, as her friends clustered round her, testing the fabric with finger and thumb, exclaiming and conjecturing about price and material. Rosette, however, planted herself in front of the widow, and looked fixedly at her for a minute or two. "Was it you really that used to bring great-grandma the cunning little musheroons?" she said at last. "I wish you'd show me where they grow, I'd like to find some myself."

"There, that's me drame," said Mrs Farrell, clapping her hand impressively on Nannie Phelan's arm. "Didn't I tell you it was a sign of somethin'? 'Deed, jewel, I'm afeard it's a trifle late in the saison for musheroons, but there might be an odd few yet in the high fields up above me house. I'll skyte up wid you to thry is there, and welcome."

"Is your house near by?" said Rosette, "for I guess we might go round there and have tea. We've brought it in a hamper, because father said

we didn't know what circumstances the Carmody family might be in. And I think *these* circumstances are real poky and smoky. Father can carry the hamper ; it's heavy."

Miss Rosette Dann was a young person whose wishes were complied with as a rule. She might presently have been seen crossing the curved sweep of sand towards Mrs Farrell's cottage, walking hand-in-hand with her great-grand-aunt, at a brisk rate, enlivened by skips and hops, to which the old woman adapted her paces quite nimbly and cheerfully.

Towards dusk that evening Mrs Doherty called on Mrs Hickey in a state of serious perturbation. "I'm after gettin' a quare turn," she said, "for I looked in just now at the Widdy Farrell's door on me way up here, thinkin' she might be apt to be after takin' a wakeness. And if I did, there was the ould crathur dressed out in I dunno what sort of deminted red rags, dancin' her steps like a three-year-ould—a jig, if you plase—in the middle of the floor, wid a couple of strange people, as well as I could see, sittin' inside and laughin' at her ; tinker tramps belike. It's daft entirely the poor ould body's gone."

"Sorra a bit daft is she," said Mrs Hickey. "Didn't you hear tell? Sure there's some people belongin' to her just after landin' over here from the States, and they as rich as Jews ; and accordin' to what they say the sither of her that run away from her own weddin' this great while back's livin' out there yet as fit as a fiddler ; and it's all

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a mistake about the widdy herself bein' any wonderful ould age to spake of. The American gentleman says 'twas her grandmother owned the prayer-book wid her name in it, and he knows the Widdy wasn't so much as born for better than forty year after the war about the tay. She's raison to dance jigs bedad. They brought her the iligantist shawl you ever witnessed."

"It's well to be her," said Mrs Doherty. "But here am I braggin' away this day to everybody at the fair that we had the wonderfulest ould ancient woman at all livin' here in Clochranbeg. And now it seems she's no oulder than plinty of other people."

"Ah well, she won't be so one of these days," said Mrs Hickey, "if she lives long enough."

And with that consideration Clochranbeg has so far had to remain content.



THE HINS' HOUSEKEEPER

BIDDY M'GOWRAN felt herself to be a person of no small importance when her grandmother had fairly set off to market and she could contemplate her own morning's work. She expected to be extremely busy, and well she might, as her task was nothing less than the "redding up" of their kitchen, which she rightly thought in bad need of such an operation. The mistake she made was in assuming that it could be satisfactorily performed by the hands and wits of seven years old.

Biddy had arrived at Kilanure only the day before, having hitherto lived with her other grandmother in a gate-lodge a long way off. Both her parents had always been dead, it seemed to her, though her grandmothers did talk as if the trouble had happened quite a short time ago. The gate-lodge she had just left was a highly ornamental one, with a little terrace of coloured tiles round it, and stained glass in the Gothic porch-windows, and all things about it were kept very spick and span. A girl came up from the village once a week to wash and scrub, and whatever could be polished was polished, and whatever could not be was dusted every day.

Why this Kilanure grandmother, whom she had so seldom seen, should now have come to fetch her away, Biddy did not know; but as she was told that she should return "one of these fine days," she started happily enough, while little, old Mrs Nolan stood under the porch, shaking her head sorrowfully in the cold March sunlight.

On their journey to Kilanure her new granny, as Biddy called her, had spoken much about her son Larry, Biddy's poor father, who, she said, had been the best son in Ireland, and the finest figure of a young man in the County Donegal. Whereas old granny had often talked of her daughter, little Molly, who used to be the prettiest girl in five parishes, and the best daughter that ever lived in this world—God be good to them all.

"And a grand worker poor Larry was," Mrs McGowran now had repeated more than once. "Ne'er a lazy bone had he in his body; I'll say that for him."

This phrase stuck in Biddy's mind, and it was chiefly a wish to prove herself a worthy daughter of such an industrious father that made her so eager to set about doing something without delay. But there were other reasons too. She was really shocked at the grimy aspect of the kitchen, as far as she could see it, for perpetual twilight dwelt behind the two tiny windows with their panes of dusty greenish glass and beetle brows of sloping grey thatch. The state of the floor struck her particularly; it felt gritty and

rough underfoot, as if incrustated with dried mud. Biddy wondered how it could have got into such a condition. The scrubbing girl, she conjectured, might not have come this week, so that granny had no one to help her except grandfather and Uncle Joe, who of course were not of any use—at all events indoors.

Biddy had often thought, as she watched Meg Hoey working at home, that it must be very delightful to have command of a great bucket filled with foaming suds, and a piece of brown soap for the making of more, besides a cloth and a brush, and liberty to splash and slop all over the shiny tiles or snowy boards. But Meg always refused to let her try, on the grounds that she would be only destroying her clean frock and delaying other people at their work. All this somehow made it now seem quite clear to Biddy that she should set about cleaning up as soon as ever she had the house to herself, and thus be able to surprise her grandparents with the improvement upon their return. She had indeed already rather surprised her grandmother by the alacrity with which she agreed that the walk to market was too far, and her vehemence in declaring that she would not be a bit lonely by herself until her grandfather came in to his dinner at one o'clock. So Mrs M'Gowran started on her long trudge, reflecting that poor Larry's little girl seemed to be a good, biddable child ; her husband went off with Joe to their field-work, having told Biddy that she was the grandest little housekeeper

alive ; and Biddy found herself at last blissfully alone. She was strenuously bent upon deserving that character.

Her first requirements were some water and a bucket, and she had the good fortune to find them both at once, in the shape of a battered old zinc pail, nearly full, standing at the back door. She resolved to be content with cold water, for the black, soot-shagged kettle on the hearth was almost as big as herself, and she had sense enough not to try lifting it. Brush and cloth must next be sought ; but here Biddy had less luck, as no semblance of the former appeared anywhere, and the nearest approach to the latter that she lit upon was a blue checked linen fabric lying folded on the window-seat. To the unprejudiced eye it was quite evidently an apron ; however, since there were two rather large holes in it she gladly decided that it could be good for nothing except a floor-cloth ; and when she had torn it across to make it a more convenient size it certainly did look like nothing better than a rag. Then, after a long and anxious quest she found, in a broken tea-pot on the dresser, a piece of soap, disappointingly thin, it is true. Still she thought it would do, and she dropped it into the bucket, intending to stir up a lather with the poker as soon as it had melted sufficiently.

While she waited for this she had leisure to notice that two grey hens and a white one were cawking dismally in a row on the top of the half-door. She had closed it to exclude them, being

much scandalised at their free-and-easy entrances. Poultry were never permitted to set scratching foot near the trim flower-beds about the castle gate-lodge, so Bidy had no experience of fowls and their habits; but she felt pretty sure that three hens would not keep on making such a disconsolate noise, like the winding up of the old wheezy eight-day clock at home, unless they wanted something very badly, and she quickly guessed that something to be their breakfast. Granny had most likely forgotten to feed them in the hurry of setting off to market.

What their usual food was Bidy could not tell, but during her late researches she had espied on a shelf under the dresser a large loaf of baker's bread, which seemed to her suitable fare. Being stale, and not well kneaded, the loaf fell in two as she lifted it out, making it all the easier to break and crumble up. As she flung the white flakes thickly into the middle of the road before the door, fowls gathered speedily about them into a flock so numerous that Bidy thought: "New granny must own a power of hins." And well she might think so, for she was entertaining unawares any of the neighbours' "chuckens" that could arrive fast enough, half flying, half running headlong, to share in this public feast.

Watching and supplying their quarrelsome repast, and wishing the big loaf yet bigger, for it was vanishing like snow in a rapid thaw, Bidy did not see that three small children, with ragged lesson-books, and a grey stuff bag, had come along

the road and stopped to look on. They were her cousins, Paddy M'Gowran's children, on their way to school, but Biddy, the stranger, knew of no such people. After a while : "Is it throwin' all her good bread to the hins you are?" inquired the taller of the little girls, who was some sizes shorter than Biddy. The sudden question startled her, but as she considered it an impertinence she did not answer. Presently : "Gimme the heel of the loaf," said the fat little boy. "It's a nice crusty bit," and he held out a hand.

"Indeed and I will not," Biddy said, twisting the tough crust. "I've got little enough for the poor hins as it is." Thereupon he tried to snatch it with a jump, but she flung it into the very centre of the bobbing heads, and withdrew empty-handed behind the half-door.

"Come on out of that wid yourselves, Lizzie and Willie," said the elder little girl. "We'll be late, and she's a cross one." So they trotted away down the road.

There was now nothing to hinder Biddy from beginning her great task immediately, and she set to work with much zeal on a patch near the door, where she fancied that the floor looked grimest. At first she thought she was making good progress, because as she scrubbed away the blue cloth quickly grew so very black and dirty that it seemed as if she must soon come upon something underlying smooth and clean, white boards or gay-coloured tiling. But this did not happen. The more she scrubbed and wrung out her wet

cloth the worse matters looked, and in one place a perceptible hollow unaccountably appeared. If such an extraordinary thing had been possible she would really have believed that the floor itself was turning into mud. She was feeling much perplexed and distressed, and had already splashed herself all over, when a sudden blot of shadow made her glance up, to see the doorway darkened. It was done by two girls, elder sisters of her last visitors, and they stood staring curiously in at her. Neither of them spoke to her, but they whispered to each other loudly with giggles.

"Herself's off marketin', I suppose. Look-a, Nan, there's the young one she said she was fetchin' home!"

"Glory be to goodness, what's she doin' at all? After spillin' the bucket of drinkin' water belike, and wipin' it up."

"A quare bad offer she's makin' at it then. And I declare now it's one of granny's good blue aperns she's got wisped up there ruined."

These remarks so exasperated Biddy that she plucked up courage to say, copying Meg Hoey's manner as closely as she could: "If I was anybody else, that came gapin' at a person doin' a bit of work, I'd stand out of the light and mind me own business, and not be delayin' other people."

Her rebuke seemed to amuse the girls vastly, which was disagreeable. However, they went away directly, which was a relief. "Come along, Sally," Nan said, "we had a right to be there by

now. Och but it's the comical, ould-fashioned thing."

As the sound of their laughter receded Biddy determined to prevent the recurrence of all such annoying intrusions by shutting the front door, and in her haste to do so she overset the bucket, which sent wedges of water shooting out on every side. Then, while she struggled desperately with the stiff latch, a young man came sauntering by, and stopped to give it the necessary shove and shake, partly from good-nature, partly for occupation. He wore labourer's clothes, but so far had done nothing that day except whistle on the bank a bit down the road.

"Is Mrs M'Gowran widin?" said this Matt Caffrey. "Ah no, to be sure, it's at market she is this mornin'. And so yourself's keepin' house, are you—and after spillin' the sup of water on the floor? Well now, that's too bad."

"Washin' up I was," Biddy said, still with some pride.

"Bedad were you?" said Matt. "It's the first ever I heard tell of washin' up a mud floor. Maybe if you have e'er a drop of water left in it you might take a turn at the road out here. There's scarce a puddle on it to-day at all, and you've got a grand one in there begorrah." Biddy's eyes widened with consternation as she began to perceive how much worse than useless her efforts had been. "But sure there's no great harm done," Matt added, seeing her dismayed look, "I'll show

you the way it can be set to rights soon enough, if that's all that ails you."

He stepped indoors, and picking up a large iron turf-shovel, thrust it into the hottest corner of the fire, whence he presently drew it out, turned a glowing red. This he held steadily, much as a careful laundress tests her heated flat-irons, low over the wet patch on the floor, which at once began to yield up its superfluous moisture in pallid mists of steam. He repeated the process several times, till Biddy, standing by, saw things under-foot grow reassuringly firm and dry.

"There—a fly wouldn't aisy wet the tips of his ould toes on it now. And you might be layin' out the table ready for dinner, agin the others come home," said Matt, who rightly surmised that she was wishing to wield the heavy, scorching shovel, "and then they'll find everythin' rael iligant."

"True for you, I might so," said Biddy, and darted over to the dresser. But in a minute she emerged from among its deep bottom shelves with a mortified air. "I made sure I seen another loaf sittin' in there," she said, "and it's only an ould white bowl."

"Was it there you got the one you were throwin' to the chuckens a while ago?" said Matt, "for you may depind she had it keepin' for the breakfast to-morra. They do mostly be havin' a bit of baker's bread of a Sunday mornin'."

At this suggestion Biddy looked more alarmed than she knew. "Well, she can be gettin' another

one before that, I should suppose," she said in an unconcerned tone.

"What sort of trees do loaves of good bread be growin' wild on in your part of the counthry, might I ax?" said Matt, with polite gravity.

But Biddy suddenly slid down into depths of despair. "Och, what'll I do at all? Sure how could I tell it was the only one she had? And the hins was starvin' wid the hunger, and fluttherin' in at the door like aigles. And it's tormintin' me you are, talkin' about your ould trees."

"Whisht-a-whisht, there's a jewel," Matt said soothingly, "sure I wouldn't be tormintin' anybody. You made a fine offer at it, considerin'. And as for the loaf, we must contrive one way or another." He was jingling a few pennies in his pocket as he spoke, and balancing the price of whisky against the price of bread. "Just be washin' the face and hands of you, that are a thrifle black or so," he said, "and I'll be back again wid somethin' in a couple or two of minyits."

Matt had not far to go, and he trotted briskly, especially past Doyle's public, so that he very soon did return with nothing less than a portly loaf. But he found the kitchen empty, and through the open back door sounded doleful cries. "Murther alive! What's took her now?" he said, setting down the loaf and running out.

Biddy had taken Matt's advice, being indeed extremely muddy, and had gone with a jug to the small stream, which she saw flickering by, not many yards from the back door. There, stooping

over the water, she lost her footing on the slippery grass, and went headforemost in. It was quite shallow, and she might easily have scrambled up the bank if she had not got into such a panic that she could only hold on to the edge and scream.

Matt pulled her out dripping. "Well now," said he, "it's the unlucky day wid you entirely, as Tim Joyce said when his best cow choked herself swallyin' one of his new brogues. But the jug's only cracked, and that's somethin' anyway. We'll make a good job of it yit. And I'll just bring you in to me sishter over yonder, and see can she get you dried." So he conducted her along the stream, past two or three cabin-doors, till he came to one where a good-humoured young woman was standing at a tub.

"Here's a little girl, Bessie, from ould Mrs M'Gowran's," he said to her, "after dhrowndin' herself fetchin' water, and the rest of them all away; so I thought you might maybe set her to rights." And Mrs Bessie said, "Mercy on us all and more too! The little crathur's dreeped. Why, to be sure, I can borry her a loan of Katty's Sunday frock till I give them muddy things a rinse in the tub here along wid me wash, and they'll be none the worser."

Meanwhile Biddy's grandmother, and her husband, who was helping her with some parcels, were on their way home through the village. As they passed the schoolhouse, about which the children were playing, little Ellen, Lizzie and Willie M'Gowran rushed up to them eagerly with

news. "Och, granny, do you know what the cross girl at your place is after doin' on you? She's broke up your big loaf, and threw it every bit out to the hins."

"The bould little thing!" Mrs M'Gowran said in high vexation, "and I keepin' it these two days a purpose agin to-morra." She flounced on, so much perturbed that she forgot to produce the sugarsticks she had in her basket for the tale-bearers, who were thus justly punished.

A little further on she met their sisters Nan and Sally, and was greeted with: "There's fine disthruccion up at your place, granny. Poor Uncle Larry's daughter has the floor all swimmin' in says of water, and she's after tearin' your good blue apern in two halves to wipe it up wid. And the show she is herself wid mud and dirt is a sight to behold. And the childer says your loaf of bread—"

"I'm to be pitied wid the likes of her, the dear knows," said their grandmother, hurrying on faster still, with Nan and Sally following to see what would happen. But when they arrived, there stood the table in the middle of a dry floor, and on it glimmered a large white loaf, which a black hen was eyeing warily, as if about to aim a judicious peck.

"What romancin' at all had yous then?" Mrs M'Gowran said, turning her wrath upon the two girls. "There's naught amiss wid the floor, and she needn't ha' meddled wid the loaf to be lavin' it out, but it's right enough. Shoo, get along,

you ould baste ; it's one of Mary Gallaher's pullets. I wonder where the child is herself."

Here Matt Caffrey put his head in at the back-door. "Matt, avic," said Mrs M'Gowran, "might you happen to see little Biddy runnin' about anywhere?"

"I seen her," Matt said rather solemnly, "times and again. And the last time I seen her it's as near as anythin' she was dhrowndin' herself dead, the crathur, outside there, strivin' to fetch you in a jug of clane water you might be wantin' when you come home. Och no, ma'am, she isn't hurted, glory be to goodness ; I had her hefted out in a brace of shakes. Me sisther's just givin' her a dry at her fire, and she'll bring her round to you directly. 'Twould be a pity of anythin' happenin' her, for there isn't a finer-lookin' child in the parish. It's yourself she favours, ma'am."

Sure enough Matt's sister immediately arrived, leading Biddy, very trim and tidy in a clean pink cotton frock. But at this moment Nan, who had been poking the loaf, triumphantly announced a discovery : "It isn't your one at all, granny. Scaldin' hot it is, just out of the oven like, instead of bein' stale."

"Blathers, Nan M'Gowran, hers it is," Matt said, and paused, divided between a wish to screen Biddy and to let his own generosity appear.

Biddy, however, settled the question herself. "There wasn't e'er a bit of anythin' else to be givin' the hins," she said, "and the feathers of

all of them standin' on end wid the hunger. So I gave them the whole of the loaf ; but the strange man said he'd bring another—before he saved me out of the river it was."

" Well, well," said Mrs M'Gowran, mollified by relief from several alarms, " she done the best she could, and she isn't of a size to have over-much sinse yet awhile."

" And the hins wouldn't find fau't wid her housekeepin' anyway," said her husband. " Deed now, she was a grand housekeeper—for the hins."

And thus Biddy M'Gowran came by her nickname, which she took with her—so fast it stuck—years afterwards, when she went to keep a house of her own at Clochranbeg.



TWO PAIR OF TRUANTS

EVER since little Minnie Lawlor, accompanied by her mother and younger sister, had come to live with her grandmother in a gate-lodge of Shanlough Castle, her great wish had been to visit the castle itself, which was always whetting her curiosity by showing just the rim of one turret, like the edge of a crinkled cloud, over the rounded tree-tops in the distance. But it was not until some months had passed that she found an opportunity. Then, on a showery May morning, her mother set off early to Killavin Fair ; her grandmother was pinned to the big chair in the chimney-corner by an access of rheumatics ; Lizzie Hackett, the cross girl who scrubbed for them, sent word that she could not come till noon ; and, as the last link in this chain of lucky chances, the rope-reins of Willie Downing's ass-cart snapped right in front of the lodge gate just when Minnie and Baby were setting off for school. "Bad manners to you, Juggy, for a contrary ould baste !" Willie was saying as he halted for repairs. "Would nothin' else suit you but to set me chuckin' th' ould reins till they broke on us in a place where a man

hasn't so much as a bit of string?" Willie, being twelve years old, seemed of formidable age and size to Minnie, who was seven: but the good-natured expression of his face, where large freckles made a well-covered pattern, emboldened her to propose the plan which had occurred to her at the sight of the empty ass-cart. As a preliminary, however, she supplied him with the longest bit of twine she could twitch from the thrifty wisp hung on the hook of a dresser. After which, "Is it anywheres near the castle you'll be drivin' to?" she inquired, pointing in that direction.

"I'm apt to be passin' it pretty middlin' near," said Willie, struggling to knot a pair of rather skimpy ends.

"And do you think you could be takin' me and Baby along wid you that far?" said Minnie.

"What for at all?" he said, looking doubtful.

"To see the grandeur that's in it," replied Minnie.

"Up at th' ould place?" said Willie. "I never heard tell there was any such a thing in it."

"Well, there's grand people in it, at all events," said Minnie. "Me grandmother does be sayin' the Fitzallens hasn't their equals next or nigh them. Lords of the land they are, and the top of everythin'. I'd like finely to be seein' them, and so would Baby. But if we've any talk of walkin' a step up the avenue, me grandmother always says: 'On no account suffer them, Maria; it mightn't be liked by the Family.' So we do be stoppin' in the little ugly shrubbery."

"I dunno is there e'er a lord in it," said Willie, doubtfully. "If there is, I never laid eyes on him." This was disappointing.

"I suppose you're very ignorant," Minnie remarked after a slight pause, as if she had sought and found a satisfactory explanation.

"Pretty middlin' I am, sure enough," Willie said more decidedly, and then added, as if he, too, had hit upon a probable conjecture: "Belike yous would be wantin' to see Mrs O'Rourke, th' ould housekeeper?" Minnie might have replied truly that she had never heard tell of any such person; but as the idea seemed to remove her new acquaintance's difficulties she answered: "Ay, sure we could go see her if you took us along. I can step in meself over the wheel, and you can aisy give Baby a heft up." "But in my belief it's goin' to school the two of yous had a right to be," Willie said, relapsing into doubt again as he glanced at their small bundle of ragged-edged books.

"Och, me mother'd say we might have a holiday this minyit, only she's went to the fair," Minnie affirmed confidently, though she might have had some difficulty in reconciling this belief with her gladness that there was not present anybody whose permission need be asked. "I'll get in first."

"Themselves inside there might be infuriated wid the whole of us," said Willie, still unconvinced.

"Sure you're not a tinker, are you?" Minnie

said, ostentatiously surveying the no-contents of the cart. "They do be biddin' us have nothin' to say to tinkers, but ne'er a tin can or anythin' I see in it." As Willie's objections seemed to be over-ruled by this argument, she continued: "So Baby and I'll run in and leave our books, and get our good hats; we'll be back agin you have the reins mended—mind you wait for us."

Her anxiety about her appearance before the eyes of the grand people made her risk losing the chance of seeing them at all as she hurried herself and her sister into their best jackets and new hats trimmed with pink gauze and daisies; while a wild hope she secretly entertained that they would be offered hospitality up at the castle led her to discard the basket containing their dinners. Baby, indeed, was inclined to demur at this, so Minnie compromised the matter by extracting the two oranges which crowned the menu, and Baby, bearing the golden balls, followed as contented as any ordinary queen.

The ass-cart had obligingly waited for them, and Willie Downing had spread a sack for them to sit on at the back. He also helped Baby to scramble up, but unfortunately said to Minnie, "You'd better be keepin' a hold on her, for ones of that size don't have much wit. She'd drop off as aisy as a sod of peat, and be delayin' me to pick her up"—a remark which Baby resented, as albeit three years short of Minnie's age, and thrice as young as Willie, she had a strong sense of her own dignity. Otherwise the drive was

very thoroughly enjoyable. The cart was not, indeed, a luxurious vehicle, being simply a flat wooden tray on wheels, with no springs to soften its jolts, and no rail to prevent one of them from jerking out an unwary passenger. But the little girls thought it a most desirable substitute for their stuffily stupid schoolroom, and when they were rocked as if in a boat on a choppy sea, Minnie said that it was as good as going two ways at once. Juggy's pace was slow, as suited her venerable appearance, for many years had made her as white as if she had been bleached and as stiff as if she had been starched. Willie had a thick ash stick, with which he every now and then made a loud rattling clatter on the front board of the cart. "You might as well," he explained, "be batin' ould carpets as Juggy, but the noise keeps her awake sometimes." Minnie and Baby, however, had so much to look at in the strange bog-land through which the cart was passing that they were in no hurry for the end of their drive. In fact, even Minnie felt a little forlorn when Willie drew up at a small gate in a high stone wall and said: "I'll be droppin' yous here. It's the nearest I can be bringin' yous to the castle. You'll find your ways to it pretty middlin' aisy by them shrubbery paths, unless you take the wrong turn; you might ready enough, for there's a dale of diff'rent walks through it, but they'll bring you somewheres anyhow. Git along out of that, Juggy." For then it suddenly occurred to her that they had

come a long way, which they must travel back all by themselves. Willie's directions, too, were not by any means as clear as she could have wished, but no more were to be had, as Juggy started perversely without her usual delay ; and although he shouted something as he jogged away, they could make out only the words "pretty middlin'," and it was useless to call "what?" Soon the sounds of the creaking wheels and clattering stick died out of hearing ; so Minnie took Baby in tow and ran into the shady shubberies, hoping rather uneasily for the best.

Now, on this same May morning, and in the same neighbourhood, two other young persons were planning an adventurous expedition. Mick and Rosanna Tierney, who lived in the village of Glasdrum, not far from Shanlough Castle, were bigger children than Minnie and Baby Lawlor, and attended the white-washed school near the Lawlor's gate-lodge, but less regularly than they would have liked to do. For when they were kept at home it was by no means to amuse themselves, and they much preferred their holidays at school. On this morning, however, although they grumbled over their tasks, it was not because they were prevented from pursuing their studies, but because they particularly wanted to go and spend their pennies at Killavin Fair. Mick had five and Rosanna had four, partly in halfpence, so that when their wealth was all spread out on the top of the low yard wall, the row of coins looked long enough to buy almost anything.

And at Killavin Fair wonderful purchases might be made. The young Tierneys had heard that you could get four sugar-sticks, "the len'th of your arm," for one penny, and there were swinging boats, and a theatre, and other shows to which the same sum would procure admission. Accordingly, they had set their hearts firmly upon it. But unluckily Mrs Tierney had been told that "great bargains entirely" would appear there in the shape of "rael grand blankets, that heavy you could scarce believe the weight of them, wid a quare reasonable price on them whatever," and having scraped together a few shillings she was very anxious to inspect these wares. To Mick and Rosanna, in this warm May weather, heavy blankets seemed highly uninteresting, but their mother saw further and considered her business of more importance than sugar-sticks or merry-go-rounds. Thus it happened that Rosanna and Mick were required to stay at home minding Biddy and Peter. The charge seemed to saddle them with quite disabling incumbrances; for Peter was subject to panics at anything new and strange in his eighteen months' experience of life, and would certainly roar without ceasing if brought in among the marvels of the fair, while three-year-old Biddy, though quiet and tractable, was too little to walk, and too heavy to be carried, a couple of Irish miles. "Sure, you might as well be liftin' a sack of pitaties," said Rosanna; and Mick added: "Ay, bedad, and you could aisy be shyin' a one of them down the road as far as she'd

go without whingein' to rest." Yet though matters looked so hopeless the day was still young when a promising scheme presented itself to them. Mick had just captured Peter, who was in the act of toddling off up the street on some excursion of his own, and who loudly resented his arrest.

"Och, now, whisht bawlin'," Mick said to Peter. "Was it losin' yourself you wanted to be? Bobby Byrne was tellin' me," he remarked to Rosanna, "that they got a stray kid out on the bog one day last week. Belongin' to the tinkers they thought it was."

"And what did they do wid it?" Rosanna inquired.

"Brought it to the Shanlough Barracks down below there till the polis would be findin' out who owned it."

"I wish to goodness we could be lavin' *these* two there," said Rosanna.

"I wish we could so," said Mick.

"We could carry them that far ready enough — it's only a shortish step," Rosanna went on slowly, as if she were considering something really possible; "and then, if we'd left them down there, we might skyte over the bog to Killavin, that's the nearest way, and see the fair, and pick them up again when we would be comin' back, as handy as anythin'. The polis 'ud mind them first-rate; it's their business to look after whatever's gone lost."

"But sorra a bit of these ones *is* lost," objected Mick.

"And sure, couldn't we very aisy lose them," said Rosanna, "somewheres convanient to the barracks?"

"The ould lads," Mick said, meaning the police, "would know right well whose childer they are, and where they come from."

"And what great harm if they did, you gaby?" said Rosanna. "And besides, aren't they a new set that's only a few weeks in it? Very belike they never laid eyes on either of them."

"Gaby yourself," Mick said, "but Biddy'd be apt to tell them anyhow. She's gettin' to spake terrible plain."

"Biddy niver say's e'er a word except '*Yis*' when she's wid strange people; she's a good child," Rosanna said with confidence. "But I was thinkin' if we might by chance run up agin mother in the fair, and then where'd we be?"

"Och, for the matter of that we could dodge her aisy enough in the crowds there'll be in it," said Mick.

"Let's thry, at all events," said Rosanna, suddenly, pursing up her mouth, and eyeing him with the expression of a magpie who is not sure how near he may venture to hop. And Mick said, "We will, bedad."

Not very long afterwards, Police-Sergeant Corry, sitting with his pipe and newspaper in the porch of Shanlough Constabulary Barracks, saw crawl in at the gate a small child, who was followed

on foot by another somewhat bigger. "Run away with you," he called to them, and resumed his reading. But when he finished his column he perceived that they had sat down half way up the flagged path to the door, with no apparent intention of moving on. So he went to investigate.

His inquiry was on the whole unsuccessful. The baby's evidence was quite inarticulate, and the little girl replied "Yis" to all his questions in a manner which made her a most unsatisfactory witness. It was a lonely place, on the edge of the bog, with no other houses near, and nobody else in sight; though, if he had only known, two pairs of eyes were all the while watching him through the thick fuschia hedge. "They don't belong to tramps," he said to himself, "for they've got very respectable boots on them, and dacint hats. Tell me, now, which way you're after comin' along here, there's a good child," he said to Biddy, and Biddy said "Yis." Just then it began to rain violently, which led the Sergeant to bring them indoors to his wife, who was sewing in the little parlour. "Here's a couple of childer that can't give an account of theirselves," he said to her. "We'd better keep them a bit, and as like as not we'll presently have somebody peltin' in with inquiries." Whereupon Mrs Corry, having had some experience of such cases, gave them slices of sugar-sprinkled bread, and several empty spools to play with in a corner, while immediately afterwards two figures might have been espied running

off at full speed across the bog, among the grey curtains of the shower.

About this time Tom Flannery was digging in his potato-patch at the fork of the Letteresk and Glasdrum roads. "Faix now, but Lizzie Hackett's in a fine hurry, whatever ails her," he said to himself as he became aware of a young woman trotting along the dyke. "Where at all are you takin' off wid yourself to?" he shouted as soon as she was near enough; and Lizzie shouted back across the low stone wall: "Sure, they're in great distraction above at the lodge. The two childer's lost. They went out this mornin' early, but a while ago the schoolmistress looked in wid word they'd niver been next or nigh her. Stole they are by them tinkers, I'll bet you anythin', and their poor mother away at the fair, and the ould woman shakin' in her chair fit to thrimble the house down on her head. But runnin' up to Connolly's farm I am, for Minnie and Baby's went there a few times along wid me, and its mostly the only place they know their way to hereabouts. You didn't be chance see them goin' by this mornin'?"

"Sorra a stim, *this* mornin' nor *that* mornin'," said Tom. "But if they're strayed or stole you'd a right to lave word with the polis."

"Och, lave word with them yourself," Lizzie said, setting off again, partly because she never liked taking advice, and partly because she did not now wish to lengthen her hot race by calling at the barracks.

Tom rejoined : " Bedad, I've somethin' else to do, me dear ! " But when, by-and-by, he finished his job, he turned a bit out of his homeward way that he might pass the police-station. Sergeant Corry was looking over the arched gate into the road. " Dry weather, Sergeant, when it isn't wet," said Tom. " Did you hear tell anythin' of two children bein' lost ? "

" What sort of childer now ? " said the Sergeant. " Well, I dunno very rightly," said Tom. " I never seen them ; but they're out of the lodge over there at the castle entrance, and ould Mrs Lawlor's expectin' her death wid the fright. A little girl and a baby, I think, they said."

" Sure enough they answer to that description, the two I have inside here. The small one's no size to spake of, and the other's a girl, though she hasn't got the gift of the gab yet. I'll send them over to the lodge with Doyle and Atkinson that's about settin' off pathrollin'. It 'ill be a good job to get them shifted into their own quarters before night."

To the lodge, accordingly, two tall constables carried the little Tierneys, encountering by the way a fierce shower, which twisted Biddy's black locks into dripping rats' tails, and soaked Peter's fluff of fair hair till it shrunk into nothing, like a wisp of wet thistledown. Their arrival caused bitter disappointment to Mrs Lawlor, junior, who had lately returned to her despoiled home. She vehemently declared the forlorn-looking

bundles to be no children of hers, nor any-ways like them, and was disposed to resent the constables' conjecture that Minnie and Baby had just run off for diversion with some of their schoolfellows to the fair. However, she consented to keep these strange children while a search was being made, and she beguiled her suspense by getting them into dry garments, outgrown by the probable victims of tinkers and tramps.

Meanwhile, Minnie and Baby had in reality been experiencing many vicissitudes. At first all had gone fairly well with them. After some roaming they had emerged from the shrubberies on to a sloping lawn, whence they had a grand view of the castle with its turrets and towers. It pleased them so much that they sat down on a bench beneath a big sycamore to enjoy the prospect and their oranges. This was the highest point of their success; for when they had just finishing peeling, and the grass all around them was thickly strewn with shreds of white-lined golden rind, suddenly there appeared to them an elderly, angry man in a straw hat, who wanted to know what they meant by trespassing on his grounds, and bade them clear up that disgraceful litter at once, and stood pointing his stick and glaring dreadfully at every single scrap of peel until it was picked up; and then, as they fled away like scared rabbits, shouted that he would give notice to the police to keep an eye on them. Thenceforward troubles gathered and gloom.

When they escaped from the labyrinth of shrubberies they found themselves in strange fields, where they met with herds of what were certainly beasts, and, in Minnie's opinion, most likely bulls. They were hunted out of a rickyard by a barking dog, and in their flight Baby lost a shoe, which they dared not turn back to discover. Soon afterwards she ran a thorn into her unshod foot and could hardly hobble along. It came on to rain so heavily that their new hats were battered and drenched out of all shape and hue, and Minnie tore a sleeve of her good jacket into ribbons scrambling through a hedge. As time elapsed they felt more and more thoroughly lost, and their terrors were increased by a dread that all the while they might perhaps be trespassers with the eye of the police upon them.

But at last, when they had almost despaired of ever, as Baby said, "bein' *anywhere* again," as they stumbled along the edge of a ploughed field, they were met by a big boy carrying a bunch of bright tinware. Minnie had luckily still sense enough left to explain that they were looking for a gate-lodge of the castle; upon hearing which the boy just caught each of them by an arm and swung them through a gap in the ragged hedge, setting them down plump in the middle of a muddy lane. "Sure, there's one widin' a couple of stones' throws off you, only you was headin' the wrong way to get to it," he said, pointing along the lane. "Them's the gate-posts glimpsin' at you out of the trees." And the children per-

ceived with relief and amazement that so it actually was. Full of joy and confidence they started again, but before they had gone many steps they met Lizzie Hackett setting out to see if there were any signs of the constables coming back with news of what, in her own mind, she called "them young torments."

"Saints and patience!" she said when she saw them, "and so there you are. I declare to goodness I thought it was a couple of beggar childer comin' along, you're that quare shows. Where in the earthly world have you been the whole day?"

"We just took a bit—a bit of a walk like," Minnie said, beginning to feel that their difficulties might not yet be all at an end.

"Well, to be sure—a fine bit of a walk," said Lizzie, "wid your poor granny and your poor ma terrified out of their sivin sinses, and meself kilt stravadin' over the parish after you. A race's runnin' on you for a couple of as bould childer as there is in Ireland." Lizzie, being out of humour with everybody, preferred the chance of paying out the truants for the trouble they had caused her to the excitement of announcing their return, so she continued: "Howsome'er, you've no call to be hurryin' yourselves now. You can be stoppin' away as long as you plase, and longer after that again, for your ma says she won't be bothered any more to put up wid the likes of such ungovernable brats, and she's got herself a couple of nice, good little

childer to keep that won't be annoyin' her losin' themselves about the country instead of goin' to their school. And she's after dressin' them illigant in the cloth cape that was belongin' to you, Miss Minnie, and a one of Baby's cotton frocks, and the two of them's sittin' this minyit as grand as anythin' at all before the fire in the parlour. Pettin' them finely herself is and not thinkin' a thraneen of yous. It's in your beds that them ones 'ill be sleepin' this night. But sure you'd rather be tearin' about under the rain in the fields like the rabbits," said Lizzie, pulling her shawl over her head and walking on. "And it pitch dark," she added over her shoulder.

If Minnie had been in her ordinary frame of mind she would have perceived how improbable this story sounded, and would have said to Baby : "Och, never mind ; she's only romancin'." Just then, however, she was too tired and bewildered to take a sensible view of anything, and what Lizzie asserted alarmed and enraged them both. Still they more than half hoped that they would find it was not true at all. But as they trotted and hobbled past the parlour window they got a glimpse into the fire-lit room, and there, sure enough, two horrid little children were seated before the hearth, one wearing a pink frock, the other Minnie's well-known brown cape. And he—which was the worst part of it—sat on Minnie's mother's knee, with a bitten biscuit in his hand. "'Deed she has really got them," Minnie said to Baby with a sort of groan. "There's no good in

us goin' in any more." And both the little girls flung themselves down on a mossy log, which had been made into a seat, beneath an old laurel bush near the door. They had not noticed the sound of footsteps that were following them, but just then two figures came rushing by and darted into the house. In the parlour Mrs Lawlor heard the patter of feet, which she had been listening for so long, and she jumped up very quickly, only to meet with another disappointment.

Mick and Rosanna Tierney had enjoyed their time at the fair. They saw two shows, and bought as many sweets as possible with their remaining pennies. They were careful not to meet their mother, nor did they forget how desirable it was that they should be at home again before her. The heavy rain, too, made it easier for them to tear themselves away from among the stalls and booths and carts and set off across the bog to pick up Biddy and Peter at the barracks. Rosanna had three fruit drops and half a peppermint sugar-stick tied up for them in a corner of her wet pinafore. Mick had meant to bring Biddy a bull's-eye, but he put it into his mouth just to taste, and forgot to take it out until it was too late.

At the police barracks the rain had driven Sergeant Corry indoors, but he came out when he heard the children clattering into the porch.

"If you plase, sir," Mick said, panting, "we want the couple of childer we left—I mane we *lost*—here this mornin' going to Killavin—a little

one, and a bigger little girl—dark hair she has, the same as *her*.” “They’ve straw hats on them,” Rosanna struck in, “and the youngster has a grey flannen frock, and Biddy’s is blue, and she’s black stockin’s. She wouldn’t tell you her name, or say anythin’ only ‘Yis.’”

“Them’s the very two we had here till a while ago I packed them off to Mrs Lawlor up there at the castle lodge. Bedad,” said the sergeant, “it’s the wrong children I’m after sendin’ her. And what do you mean, I should like to know, by leaving them crawling about here and giving trouble and annoyance?”

But the Tierneys were not waiting to listen. “Come along, Rosanna,” said Mick, “we might be in time to get them yet if we hurry.” And they did hurry with an impetuosity which brought them head foremost into the Lawlors’ kitchen.

“What brings you here at all?” poor Mrs Lawlor said in much vexation when she saw who they were not. “It seems to me every strange child in the parish is takin’ upon itself to come tumblin’ in on top of us except me own little girls, and the deer knows where they may be.”

“We was only wantin’ to fetch away our two,” said Mick. “The sergeant sent you the wrong childer. That’s Peter you’ve got, ma’am—och, and there’s Biddy. You take hold of her, Rosanna; I’ve took him. And I seen a couple of little girls sittin’ roarin’ on the sate there next door, and we runnin’ in, that might be your ones, ma’am.”

Out sped Mrs Lawlor, hopeful again, and this time not in vain. "Children dear, what happint you at all?" she said, "and where have you been?"

"We got into an ould donkey-cart," Minnie said deplorably, "and then we lost our ways—and an ould man's after settin' the police to keep an eye on us—and Baby's one shoe is off her, so the other's no good; and she's run a thorn into her foot; and I've tore the cuff off of me sleeve; and our hats is destroyed. But we thought there wasn't any use goin' in, for Lizzie tould us you'd took them other ones instead."

"A donkey-cart!" said Mrs Lawlor. "I always said those thieves of tinkers were at the bottom of it. But come in, me jewels; sure you're drowned and perished. The polis ought to be ashamed of theirselves for not minding their business better."

And in Mrs Lawlor's mind, indeed, the blame was permanently shared by the tinkers and the police, which was of course convenient for her children, and probably did not in any way affect either the police or the tinkers.

As for the young Tierneys, they got home with such guilty expedition that they were all discovered innocently safe and dry by their own fire-side when Mrs Tierney returned, with sugar-sticks, from the fair. And thus we must fear that the episode ended in a lamentable failure of poetical justice to all parties concerned.



THEIR NEW UMBRELLAS

ONE blustering March afternoon Mrs Mooney looked in at Thomas Cantillon's to fetch a boot he was stitching for her, and there she found her neighbour, Mrs Doyle, half-way through a story. "I thought 'twas headlong into the deep gripe 'twould land me before ever it stopped," Mrs Doyle was relating, "for the tuggin' and pullin' of it was more than I could contend wid."

"You'd a right to let it go altogether sooner than that, ma'am," said old Thomas, "considerin' the pair of you'd be very apt to ha' sted there once you got in."

"'Deed now, maybe I might as well anyway," said Mrs Doyle, "for I question will I get e'er a day's work out of it again. Every bone in its unlucky body that isn't broke seems to be twisted crooked, and strained like."

"And what baste at all was it you were tryin' to control, ma'am?" inquired Mrs Mooney. "If it was that ugly-tempered mule of Kelly's, you're the foolish woman to make an offer at it. Sure it's as much as me own Tony himself can do to manage the ungovernable crathur."

"Mules!" said Mrs Doyle. "What talk had

anybody of them? Sure I was tellin' Mr Cantillon the way me umbrella got destroyed on me yisterday, comin' home from Mass in the storm. The win' took a holt on it the instant I come out on the straight road, and had it next door to wranched out of me hand; and then inside out it blew itself on me wid a flap you might aisy hear in the city of Cork, and only for Dinny runnin' up and raichin' it down for me out of the sky, you might say, the dear knows where the either of us 'ud be this minyit. But look at the objec' it is now. I misdoubt will it ever be fit for anythin' again, unless scarin' the crows."

The umbrella did certainly appear much the worse for its recent unequal struggle. It was stuck helplessly half-open, bent ribs thrust themselves through jagged rents in its weather-stained cover, a menacing crack ran up its varnished yellow stick. Mr Cantillon, who makes boots, and mends miscellaneous property for Killymena, shook his head over this new patient long enough to emphasise the extremely skilful treatment which its case would require, and then he said: "Ah sure, ma'am, I'll put some sort of a shape on it for you, ma'am, one way or another, though it 'ill be a ticklish job, and I wouldn't like to promise you that it 'ill present a very handsome appairance. But just for to be usin', I wouldn't wonder if it was as good as new."

"That's more than ever it was widin my

recollection then," said Mrs Mooney ; " darned it was, and the handle chipped ever since as long back as when ould Fergus Doyle did be ownin' it."

" Ay, did he, bedad ! our family always kep' an umbrella," said Mrs Doyle.

As an umbrella is kept by several of the most respected families in Killymena, umbrellaless Mrs Mooney naturally surmised an innuendo in the statement, and hastened to rejoin : " Well, if it was me, I'd liefer get a drop of wet now and again than streeel about houldin' up an ould flitterjig that 'ud have people laughin' at me behind me back, and I consaitin' meself a great one all the while. I'd as soon put me head in a rag-bag be way of a shawl."

" Sure, then, it's well to be you, ma'am, that's so contint the way you're like to stop," Mrs Doyle said, just a shade, perhaps, over-politely.

" See you here, Mrs Mooney, I've got your repairs done," said Thomas Cantillon, preventing a repartee by the production of Mrs Mooney's boot from behind his chair.

" You're after patchin' it," she said, examining it with a lengthened face. " I thought a stitch was all it wanted. But in coorse a man must keep his trade goin'. That 'ill be a pinny more on me, I suppose now."

" Och, keep your pinnies and tuppinnies, ma'am," said Thomas ; " me's trade's not so slack that I've any need to be stirrin' it up wid clappin'

on extrý patches. You can pay me the next pinny that tumbles down your chimney, and so can Mrs Doyle for her umbrella that I'll have regulated again next Sunday."

So Mrs Doyle and Mrs Mooney pointedly wished Mr Cantillon good evening, and wished one another nothing good or bad — at least not audibly — as they departed in opposite directions.

A sort of rivalry had long existed between Mrs Doyle and Mrs Mooney. It had begun when the simultaneous drowning of their fishermen husbands left each of them a young widow with one small baby ; and it had gone on till now, when these infants had grown to man's estate. They were, in fact, the central subject of the rivalry. At first, indeed, this had seemed hardly possible to anybody except Mrs Mooney herself, Mrs Doyle's little Dinny being so obviously a much bigger and better-tempered baby than her own little Tony, who was weakly and fretful. As time went on, however, not only did Tony's health improve, but he developed a quickness of wits and capacity for book learning which could be set against Dinny's superior size and his prowess at all manner of athletic pursuits. Mrs Mooney, when hostilely critical, called Dinny Doyle "a big oaf," while Mrs Doyle spoke of Tony Mooney as "that quare little shrimp."

The two boys themselves had lived on fairly friendly terms from three years old to twenty, and now that they were to see something of the world

beyond Killymena, they rejoiced at being able to do so in company. For they were just setting off to the city of Cork, a vast distance away, where Dinny had got employment on a little pleasure boat which rowed visitors to the Exhibition short lengths up and down the pretty River Lee ; and Tony was to keep accounts in a restaurant near the entrance-gate. Sir Gerald Vane-Montfort had spoken for them to the Executive Committee, and hence these situations, the emoluments of which seemed splendidly liberal. So when Mrs Mooney related with indignant inaccuracy at supper-time how Mrs Doyle had been giving her impudence about not owning an old rag of an umbrella, Tony did not hesitate to promise her that he would bring her home the grandest umbrella in the parish. And on this same evening likewise, when Mrs Doyle doubted mournfully whether Mr Cantillon would ever contrive to splice the cracked handle, Dinny confidently bade her never mind, for she should have the best umbrella he could get in the city of Cork. Mrs Mooney said that Tony would find plenty of things to be spending his money on besides his ould mother, and Mrs Doyle said that Dinny had a right to be saving all he could towards the rent, and the seed-potatoes, and his suit of clothes ; but notwithstanding their protests both women thought a great deal of these promises. On the grey morning of the lads' departure, Mrs Mooney said to her son : " I wouldn't mind

bettin' even sixpences that you'll never have the notion of an umbrella in your head from this minyit till you're steppin' on to the platform here again—but, sure, 'twill be a good day whether or no." Mrs Doyle was less outspoken; still, as they waited for the train, she could not forbear saying; "I declare to goodness, Dinny, the little shiny hole in the cloud there behind Loughlin's house is the very moral of the shape of the biggest tear in me ould wreck of an umbrella."

Spring, summer and autumn passed by; the season's flowers had budded, blown and faded; and the Cork Exhibition, a brilliant, artificial blossom, was to vanish like the rest. Consequently Dinny Doyle and Tony Mooney were returning to Killymena. They had experienced an eventful and memorable time, but were not, on the whole, sorry to have done with it. Dinny was rather tired of watching the little boats slide up and down the water-chute and flounder into the stream amid a flurry of shrieks and splashes. The clatter of plates and glasses, mingled with the strains of a military band, had begun to pall upon Tony in his office box. And though in out-of-work hours sights and diversions were bewilderingly abundant, the homely features of quiet little Killymena seemed to both of them just then a more alluring prospect. Tony, it is true, was planning to leave it again soon for good, having heard of a situation near the city, whither he would, if possible, persuade his mother to

move ; but Dinny looked forward to resuming his place in Mick Devlin's fishing-boat, and felt that it would be a pleasant thing once more to sit behind a tugging sail, in an ocean-odorous breeze, and to haul at a fishing-net. "There's more *raison* and *sinse* in that after all," he concluded, "than in paddlin' about wid people that might as well be a flock of demented saygulls, accordin' to the foolish gabbin' they have out of them." It was thus that, in captious moods, he characterised the conversation of his passengers. "And they holdin' up them little frilly-flouncy affairs over their quare big hats — *sunshades* — musha cock them up, it's the iligant wisps they'd be if there come a sup of rain," he often added disdainfully. But then the far more effectual shelter that he was going to provide for his mother's shawled head generally occurred to him, and always restored his good-humour. Tony also bethought him from time to time of his promise ; but he found the recollection less soothing.

The two youths met on a platform of the labyrinthine-lined Cork railway terminus, and waited the tardy coming of their train seated on a bench beneath a lurid advertisement of coffee essence. They piled their baggage in a small heap between them, and kept upon it vigilant eyes, especially on two long, slender, brown-papered parcels : Dinny, indeed, felt more secure when his was in his own hand.

"I see you're bringin' an umbrella too," Tony said, referring to this. "I've got me mother's

there. It was in a little shop on the Coal Quay ; a good plain one it is. Bedad now, I might as well stop away as come back widout it, she's that set on a one."

"I seen this in a shop-windy in the Main Street a while ago," said Dinny, "and I've been wonderin' would I have the price of it saved in time. 'Twas only yisterday I had be good luck. There was ne'er another in it that I liked the appairance of as well. The girl sellin' them said 'twas gintleman's size, and I'd better take a lady's one, that 'ud come somethin' chaiper ; but says I to her, me mother was as good as any gintleman ever stepped, and I wouldn't put her off wid a skimpy size for the sake of a half-crown when I had it in me pocket. Rael tasty the handle is ; and they say the mischief himself couldn't blow it wrong side out ; the frame's guaranteed."

"Gintlemen's size might be apt to be a thrifle heavy and clumsy like for her to be carryin'," Tony said hopefully.

"Divil a bit of it," said Dinny ; "me mother's a strong woman yet, glory be to God. Just weigh it in your hand—or stop a minyit ; I'll sthrip the paper off of it and show you."

Dinny unfastened the knotted twine with deft sailor's fingers, and drew the slim, dark-green umbrella out of its shiny black case. The sleek folds were furled with wonderful symmetry about a polished cherry-wood stick, which ended in a richly-carved knob studded with burnished stars ; a silver band further adorned it, and a twining

shamrock spray, while a long flossy tassel floated with a finishing touch of elegance. "I won't hoist it up," he said, "for fear I mightn't get it rolled again as smooth as they done it in the shop. But you can see by the feel of it that its rael strong silk ; twilled it is."

He was so absorbed in the proud pleasure of displaying and repacking his purchase that he did not observe how Tony's countenance had fallen, and he looked up from his knot-tying with amazement at the tragical tones which burst forth.

"Silk bedad!" Tony said bitterly ; "troth it is that. And the handle bates everythin'. She won't look at mine, that's sartin, for it's as plain as plain, and only black alpacky it is, or some other common ould stuff. The man said it was good wear ; but when she sees it alongside of silk—och, murder ! What did that one stand you in now?"

"Siventeen-and-six," said Dinny.

"And mine I gave five shillin's for, and me wid a florin a week more than you. I might as well be slingin' it under the next train passes ; there's the whole of it. Sorra the hap'orth of use there is bringin' it home to her, for it's only annoyed she'd be. But ne'er another penny I had to spend on it, what wid this thing and that."

Tony thrust his hands into his pockets, and with his eyes fixed gloomily on the toes of his brogues, and his shoulders shrugged up to his ears, sat moodily recalling the circumstances amid which

his wages had so insidiously melted away. In the retrospect his proceedings looked silly enough. The tempting side-shows of the Exhibition, the rifle ranges, bars and refreshment-rooms had accounted for many small coins ; others had been swallowed, to even less profit, by the penny-in-the-slot fortune-telling machines, which were stuck like snails all over the walls of the Exhibition buildings, or had gone for slides down the switchback and water-chute. He was feeling thoroughly disgusted with himself and his investments when Dinny pulled him by the sleeve. "Look here," he said, "aren't you and your mother about quittin' out of Killymena for good next week?"

"We are so, if she'll be ruled by me," said Tony, "but divil a bit of me knows what mislikin' she may take against it now if she's disappointed over the plain umbrella."

"Well then," said Dinny, "I'll thry can I conthrive so that me mother won't be usin' hers till the Sunday after, the way your mother won't be put out of consait wid that one. She'll like it well, no fear, so long as she doesn't get the notion that another's grander. Mind you, I dunno will I be able, for me mother'll be dead set on takin' it to Mass to-morra ; but I'll do me endeavours. I might manage to mislay it; that wouldn't be a bad plan."

Yet, while he proposed it, Dinny felt that he was despoiling his return of perhaps its most triumphant moment ; and Tony, not unaware of

this, said, with appreciation : "Yourself's the dacint man."

The circumstances which attended their home-coming seemed to favour Dinny's design, for the night was so dark when they reached Killymena that the two women waiting at the dimly-lit station could barely see their sons, let alone take stock of bundles and parcels. Dinny got his baggage into his little nook of a room and stowed away the dangerous package unseen quite successfully. All supper-time he was expecting his mother to ask some question about her promised present, but she never did, though she threw out several hints that it went to his heart to ignore. But when she had wished him good-night, and he was standing, the long parcel in his hand, considering whether he could find it a safer hiding-place, she suddenly slipped in again, just for the enjoyment of another look and word, and beholding, could not forbear an exclamation : "Glory be to goodness, so you brought it after all ! I was thinkin' you maybe forgot it, unless you was only intendin' to not give it to me till we're just settin' of to Mass to-morra."

Dinny saw, accordingly, that there was nothing for it but to explain the matter fully, and if possible secure her co-operation. He stated the case as strongly as he could, enlarging upon the immensely superior quality and cost of this umbrella, and the extreme ill-nature of making poor Mrs Mooney think badly of her one, which was the best that Tony could afford. His eulogium

was judiciously vague, because he apprehended that a detailed description, much more a glimpse, of the ornate handle and sheeny green folds would render his mother's impatience to be showing them off altogether intolerant of postponement. It was not easy, even so, to prevail upon her, for memories of taunting speeches rankled to strengthen her contention that "she had no call to be puttin' herself about to please Judy Mooney, set her up!" However, he at length obtained her consent to lay aside the unopened parcel until to-morrow week. And he created a temporary diversion by producing a little scarlet volume out of which trailed a long and wonderful series of highly-glazed landscapes.

Next morning was, rather unluckily, just the weather for a new umbrella—drizzly showers, and no wind to threaten a precious novelty with rough usage. Nevertheless, Dinny got his mother safely off to eleven o'clock Mass under her old battered gingham, her dissatisfaction with which he sought to mitigate by holding it over her himself. He hoped that they would not fall in with the Mooneys, for he dreaded the effect which the actual sight of her neighbour's glory might have upon his mother's tongue. But when they were near the chapel door he saw what almost startled his own into unruliness, for a few yards in front of them paced Mrs Mooney, proudly holding up the very moral of *his* grand green silk umbrella—nay, it was the identical same one, and no other; he espied the silver shamrocks shining as she

furled it in the porch. Tony must have taken the wrong parcel last night by accident in the dark, "or else he done it on purpose, the villin." His outrageous conduct in keeping it made that seem highly probable; and he certainly had a guilty air as he followed his exultant mother to their seat. Dinny determined to have it out with the thief of the world the instant service was done, and he sat irefully longing for that instant to arrive.

The congregation at last broke up, and as they stepped out Mrs Doyle bade Dinny take a hold of the ould umbrella for her, because her two hands would be full trying to keep her skirts from the mud. She might have added truthfully that she wished to detain her handsome son at her elbow, and, having accomplished this, she said complacently,—

"Mercy on us, Dinny avic did you see the show poor Mrs Mooney's after makin' of herself? In such a hurry she was to be stickin' up her gazabo of a new umbrella she'd scarce wait till she was clear of the door, but took and nearly prodded the eye out of young Barney Loughlin, whirlin' it up in the face of him. The woman might ha' more wit. And it not rainin' a drop then either—it's only beginnin' again this minyit. And, child dear, but I'm glad it's a diff'rint sort of a one you brought me; for I couldn't abide the thoughts of that quare-lookin' yoke at all. It's twyste too big for one thing, and them outlandish cockasinas stuck on the handle

has an ojis, ugly apparence—rael comical. I never seen anybody wid them. I should suppose them little gimcracks do be very chape. And tellin' you the truth, I always had a great wish for a black umbrella."

"Black the one at home is anyway," said Dinny, looking somewhat disconcerted, "and as plain as plain."

"Well now, alanna, that's a good hearin'," said Mrs Doyle. "Black's the very best colour it could be, it's that dacint at a buryin'. Frettin' in me own mind I was, thinkin' you might bring me a brown or a green one. But black's iligant ; I needn't be ashamed to hould it up at any funeral on the countryside."

By this time they had overtaken Mrs Mooney and her son, who were talking to a knot of neighbours. Tony, with dismayed visage, slipped round to Dinny's free hand and whispered apologetically,—

"Och, Dinny, it was the wrong parcels we took in the dark, and before I knew where I was she had it opened on me, and in such an admiration of it she was that I hadn't the heart to be tellin' her. But I'll get it back to-morra from the crathur by some manner of manes ; I will so."

"Ah, whisht, and no matter about it," Dinny replied. "We'll swap and lave them the way they are ; me mother'd liefer have the other one."

Tony's half incredulous relief needed some further explanatory asides ; and meanwhile com-

pliments were politely passing between their mothers.

"'Deed now, Mrs Mooney, ma'am, that's a grand umbrella you've come by entirely. Rael off the common it is ; I never seen the likes of it at all."

"Ah sure, ma'am, it isn't too bad. Me son's after bringin' it home to me. But it's a heavy one, let me tell you, to be liftin' all the way, and me gown 'ill be disthroyed streelin' through the mud. Bedad it's the fine, tall, upstandin' stick you've got there to yours, Mrs Doyle, this day, and that's no lie."

Mrs Doyle, smiling broadly, said merely : "Och, he's a young slieveen ;" but she suppressed a forthcoming unfavourable critique upon the silver-banded handle, which Tony, in haste to take the hint, seized, saying : "Step along wid you, mother, and I'll studdy it over your head. Sure, it's no great weight once you're a bit used to carryin' it."

And thereupon four people, under two umbrellas, set their faces, well-satisfied, home.



A SMALL PRACTICE

THE most noteworthy event in Cocky M'Cann's history up to its ninth year was the accident by which he broke his arm and became for some weeks an inmate of the Ballygowran Union Infirmary. That this disaster befell him in the course of a repeatedly-forbidden attempt to mount Mr Scanlon's cross mare, and that he himself laid all the blame on the bosthoons who "were after coverin' her wid an ojis ould bit of sackin' as slithery as ice, the way nobody could get e'er a firm holt of her at all," were characteristic features easily recognisable by any of Cocky's acquaintances. That it *had* befallen him anyhow seemed a very serious matter to himself, but still more so to his mother, upon whom it entailed the grievous necessity of a temporary separation from her idolised only child. Nevertheless, his removal beyond reach of her petting and humouring gave him leisure to draw the morals pointed by his own doing and suffering, and to study various object lessons that were set before him as he roved convalescent through the wards. But although these were not wholly without effect, and although he did return to Ballylogan a few degrees less head-

strong than he had left it, he had unluckily taken up one new notion which tended to obscure any traces of improvement, and even led his neighbours occasionally to pronounce him "twyste as ungovernable as he was before."

This notion was a firm belief that during his sojourn in hospital he had acquired such skill in medicine and surgery as fully qualified him to prescribe for any of his ailing fellow-creatures, or to operate upon them, as circumstances seemed to demand. Of course, if Cocky had confined himself to entertaining this vainglorious opinion, it would have been a very harmless vanity, calling for nothing more censorious from his elders than: "Och, now, isn't it the quare, ould-fashioned crathur?" But that was by no means the case. Cocky always had a perilous propensity for putting his theories into practice, nor did he forbear to do so here whenever he saw a chance. And in consequence he became more than ever a terror to adjacent owners of small live stock, human and otherwise. Mrs M'Loughlin, for instance, was only just in the nick of time, by the best of good luck, to prevent him from administering to her little Lizzie a murky mixture compounded of varnish, washing-soda, soft soap and tea, which he declared looked and smelt the very same as the black bottle he used to be seeing Nurse Lane at the Infirmary curing hundreds and thousands of childer out of, that was worse with the whooping-cough than Lizzie.

Luck did not always intervene so opportunely.

In the case of the Nolans' duck circumstances enabled Cocky to carry out his treatment with more freedom from interference. Having kept his patient under observation for some time, he had formed the opinion that it was "waddling as crooked as a ram's horn," and furthermore that "the left leg was bruck on it, and had a right to be plastered up stiff," in the manner, as much as possible, of a fractured limb, which he had watched with interest during his attendance at his medical school; and the result was that after a day's anxious search the hapless fowl was discovered helplessly rooted to a retired spot by the ponderous ball of mortar and clay in which one leg had been encased. When extricated with difficulty its lameness appeared to be so much aggravated that Mrs Nolan was presently obliged to kill it to save its life, at a dead loss. "The finest young duck," she protested, "in the parish, and worth every penny of half-a-crown, if it wasn't only for disthruccion bein' done on it by a bould-behaved little tormint, that the polis ought to be walkin' off to the lock-up out of dacint people's way, if the seargint was good for anythin' else except playin' poker in the barrack-room and not mindin' his business." It is fair to note, on the other hand, how, in Mrs M'Cann's opinion, so confident as to be proclaimed loudly from her own front door: "One-and-six would ha' bought the last feather on the crathur's back twyste over, and divil a much else anybody'd ha' got off it—a skinny little bag o' bones, wid ne'er

a penn'orth of dirty male thrown to it ever since it looked out of the shell." As for Cocky, in response to all upbraiding he simply "gave impidence," and declared with exasperated regret that: "If the fool of a baste 'ud ha' kep' aisy wid its quackin' and bawlin' he'd have had it grandly cured soon enough, for there was nothin' else 'ud ha' been bringin' anybody next or nigh th' ould shed wunst in a month of Sundays."

The duck's fate thrilled from end to end of the M'Canns' cabin-row, and the shock would have been more entirely unpleasurable if it had happened at the expense of some family other than the Nolans. They had never been very well liked at Ballylogan, especially since a married daughter and son-in-law had come to live with them. Nobody, indeed, had much to say against old Jim Nolan, nor the daughters, Katty and Anne, while the sayings against his wife and the two Gildeas were rather vague, being seldom more definite than statements which set forth that Mrs Nolan was a quare one, and that Patsy Gildea had the face of an ass. Widow Gilletty gave voice to the prevailing sentiment when she remarked of the Gildea-Nolan alliance that "by the rule of contraries she'd have expected that Rose to have took up wid some dacinter man than himself." Still, this hazy misliking would have in a measure toned down the neighbours' disapproval of Cocky's unsuccessful experiment, had not their righteous wrath been sustained by a strong sense of the possibility that he might at

any moment seek a subject among their own belongings, an uneasiness which found relief in anticipating the curtailment of Cocky's ill-employed hours of idleness by his attendance at the Letterowen National School. He had lately begun his education there in accordance with directions left by his seafaring father, happily so much to his taste that he really followed the line of least resistance in carrying them out. Enforced abstinence now whetted his appetite for knowledge until he was eager to resume his studies almost before Mrs M'Cann considered his recovery sufficiently complete. The daily setting forth of Cocky M'Cann on an absence of several hours' duration was viewed with complacency by the eye of Ballylogan. His mother's tendency to regret was too trivial an exception to be regarded as more than, so to speak, a very slight cast in that composite orb.

Before long, however, his schooling was again interrupted, this time by a local epidemic of influenza, which caused a prolongation of the Christmas holidays. They were at Ballylogan a dismal season, what with one thing and another, including, it must be said, the presence of Cocky, who turned the calamity to his own purposes. His pleasure was to call upon house-bound sufferers, whom if he could not always persuade patiently to receive his medicine, he not seldom succeeded in seriously alarming by the grave nature of his diagnoses. "I declare to goodness, ma'am," Mrs Sweeny reported to a crony, "it's

terrified entirely me poor sister was yesterday evenin' wid the romancin' he had out of him. Sittin' all of a shake in her chair she was when I come in, and says I to meself the minyit I laid eyes on her : 'As sure as anythin', the woman's got the shiverin' ague ;' but says she to me 'twas just the turn she was after gettin' wid the awful talk of Cocky M'Cann. For says she he run in and tould her he well knew by the look of her it was mortal bad she was wid ivery sort of desperit sickness. 'Bedad,' says she, 'I couldn't make an offer at repaitin' the quare-soundin' words he said was ailin' me ; for,' says she, 'I never heard the like of them before—not wid Dr Whyte himself,' says she. 'And sure,' says she to me, 'if it was about gettin' her death she was wid any nathural description of complaint, that might be no more than the will of God, and some sinse and raison in it.' But what all that Cocky was after tellin' her was a dale worse than the *new-money* or the *bluerissy*, and it gave her the cowl'd creeps. And to the back of that, there was some manner of outrageous ould brash he was biddin' her cure herself wid—lamp-oil and traicle and salt—I dunno the half of it—and axin' me she was should she be thryin' it. So says I to her, if she'd be said by me, she'd just dhrink a good sup of hot buttermilk-whey, and let alone meddlin' wid any of the spalpeen's prescriptions—set him up—that were fit to poison the parish. But sure now, ma'am, Mrs M'Cann had a right to keep the tormintin' brat at home, instead of

him to be runnin' into other people's houses, and frightenin' them out of their misfortnit minds." To whom Julia Hogan replied: "Och, Mrs M'Cann is it? Sure she's that foolish about him, it's my belief she consaits he's the great docther entirely. If he bid her take and ait the ashes off the hearth she'd be apt to go do it; and as for him minding anythin' she said, she might all as well be spakin' to the sparras hoppin' in the hedges."

Several other neighbours were visited with similar warnings and advice, which Cocky's mother was in truth quite powerless to prohibit. But before school opened again his attention was diverted from the health of Ballylogan by a momentous occurrence. It was a piece of great luck, nothing less than his picking up on the road an envelope containing a five-pound note. The white cover had not a stroke of writing on it, and the note, its sole contents, looked speckless too, as if little handled. Now, however, it was subjected to much fingering and minute scrutiny by a selection of the M'Canns' acquaintances, losing under the process some of its unsullied crispness, while its genuine character as a Bank of Ireland note, worth a twelve months' rent and more, seemed to be thereby only the firmler established. Opinion was far less decided about the probable way in which it had come to be so improbably lying on the path under O'Carroll's fence, just at the gap where the Ballylogan children climb up and down to and from school.

The most opposite views, again, were held as to what Mrs M'Cann should do with this treasure-trove. They ranged from those of the rigid moralist who laid down the stern law that "she had a right to go straight off and lave it wid the polis or Father Mooney," to the reckless declaration that she would be "the biggest fool ever walked if she didn't spind ivery pinny of it just as she pleased." In the end she compromised the matter by determining to put it up safely until she could consult Himself, otherwise Bernard M'Cann, who was expected home from a voyage in a few weeks' time.

This arrangement met with, on the whole, approval, not being opposed even by Cocky, who was actually almost slightly over-awed by the magnitude of his own achievement. The possibility of personally consuming such vast wealth did not occur to his wildest imagination, and he readily assented to the bestowal of the precious envelope in a recondite nook. But he did make his find a pretext for demanding more than usually frequent pennies from his mother. "Just you wait, then, till I come home wid the next pounds-and-pounds note I get, me good woman," he would retort at any demur. And he so often heard laudatory comments upon "the cuteness of the crathur, mind you, that had the sinse to know it was somethin' val'able in place of to be tearin it up the way the other childer'd ha' been apt to do," that, what with conceit of wisdom, and exultance in many extra sugar-sticks, his elation

waxed apace. In fact, his spirit might at this time have been augured strutting with very appropriate gait towards an imminent fall.

As for Mrs M'Cann, the keen edge of her pleasure at their good luck was prematurely turned by a misfortune commonplace enough—too common—in the shape of a bad toothache which presently attacked her. Upon its advent all her joy in the prospect of riches vanished away with the promptitude which occasionally disposes us to wonder that happiness, perpetually suspended at the mercy of any one among a myriad nerve threads, should ever attain to even the briefest span of existence. Being a very robust person, she naturally took a despondent view of her case, and when the malady had tormented her for a night and a day she lost hope and temper. She morosely repelled the neighbours' sympathy, and even Cocky found his proffers of infallible remedies, extraction included, received with testy curtness, a novel and disconcerting experience, which made him all the more anxious that a state of things so uncongenial should come to a speedy end. He was far from pleased at being summarily told to run off wid himself and lave moidherin' a body gabbin' about what they done in the Infirmary ; 'twas no manner of use, and the cowl'd pitaties 'ud do plinty well enough for the dinner ; *she* didn't want anythin' at all, and couldn't be bothered warmin' them up.

It was on his way to fetch a jug of water from the public pump, about sunset, that Cocky fell in

with Mrs Gildea, going the same errand. Chiefly out of perversity, he held this unpopular person in somewhat high esteem, and treated her to more civility than he generally bestowed upon the other neighbours. Mrs Gildea had just then been having words with her husband, who was sitting, head in hands, on a tub at her father's door. Her words had been to the effect that if there was a bigger ould slouch in the country than himself, she didn't know where he look for him. Tom Gildea, whose several questionable qualities did not, to do him justice, comprise a huffy temper, had merely replied: "The county be choked. Sure what chance has a man to be doin' anythin' in the likes of this little ould glory-hole? Unless he'd the luck of the young rapscallion there I see runnin' out of Mrs M'Cann's house, that's after pickin' up a fortin off the road, would ha' took the two of us over to the States you do be ravin' about." To which his wife had rejoined, with acrimony: "Bedad, then, it's one while a lazy divil like you'd be pickin' up e'er a fortin in the States, or any place else."

But when, by-and-by, not many yards away, she overtook Cocky M'Cann at the pump, her manner and speech were bland and suave. Mrs M'Cann, she said to him, was a very lucky woman to own a sinsible, handy boy, that would be fetchin' her in her jugs of wather, let alone findin' her a pocketful of money, and handin' her ivery pinny of it to keep, which was more than many a one would ha' done. This flattery was

especially refreshing to Cocky, who had missed his usual household affluence of it, and he responded by pumping for Mrs Gildea so vigorously that her jug suddenly overflowed into her shoes. "Och, bad luck to you—to the ould spout of it that's quare," she said, with a jump backwards. "But sure there's no harm meant or done. Is it wetted you are, sonny dear? Well, now, you're a good boy, and the next time you get anythin' on the road, I only hope you'll be bringin' it in to me. I might be chance have a load of sweeties to swap for it."

"There mightn't ever be anythin' more on the road again," Cocky said, discreetly avoiding a committal of himself to this barter.

"Ah, sure it's just jokin' I am," said Mrs Gildea, "for, of coorse, you'd be a-bringin' whatever it was home to your mammy, to put up somewhere safe, the way she's after doin' wid the five-pound note, I'll be bound."

"We have so," said Cocky.

"I wouldn't suppose she'd be apt to be tellin' *you*, now, what place she's keepin' it in," said Mrs Gildea. "She'd liefer not, for fear you'd be meddlin' wid it, and losin' it on her."

"Oh, wouldn't she not?" said Cocky. "When only for me she'd never ha' thought of the little ould black tay-caddy in the houle in the wall, back of the dresser, by the fut of the bed, that's a dale the best place to be keepin' it in."

"Why, tubbe sure, and so it is. Yourself was the cute one to be thinkin' of it. Back of the

dresser, be the fut of the bed—so that's where she has it, and a very handy, safe place entirely. You needn't be lettin' on to her that you was tellin' me ; not that I'd be passing any remarks about it, no fear. It's nothin' to me where other people do be keepin' their ould tay-caddies. And what'll your poor mammy do widout you at all, to be runnin' her messages for her, when you're prisintly goin' back again to the school ? ”

“ To-morra I'm goin', ” said Cocky. “ But she's well able to be fetching the wathur and everythin' herself, only she's bad these two days wid the toothache, and as cross as the cats. Not a bit of her would thry the cowl'd starch poultice I bid her, or I daresay she'd be well agin now. But she might be better in the mornin'.”

On the contrary, however, in the morning Mrs M'Cann was worse, or at anyrate looked so, because her face had swelled all on one side ; “ as big as two sizeable heads of cabbage,” Cocky assured Mrs Gildea, whom he found waiting for him when he passed her door on his way back from the pump, before breakfast, with a can of water. At this time Cocky was under some concern about his mother's affliction, and this from fairly disinterested motives, as his absence all day at school would make her doleful and irascible mood a matter of small importance to himself personally. His wish for her relief was, therefore, mainly not a self-regarding sentiment, though he did in some measure consider the possible effect upon the replenishing of his dinner-basket.

"The face of her swelled up awful, and got ne'er a wink of sleep the whole night?" Mrs Gildea repeated upon hearing these symptoms. "Deed now, the poor woman's to be pitied. But look here, sonny, I've got a little drop of stuff here, you might be givin' her, would make her sleep grand, and do her all the benefit ever was." She showed, from beneath her shawl, a hand holding a small, nearly empty bottle. "It always sent me poor father-in-law off like a top, when he was bad a couple of years ago, every time he took it; you might as well ha' been offerin' to wake up a one of the hearth-stones as him, ten minyits after he'd had his dose of it. Little enough of it he left behind him; but there's somethin' better than a small-sized spoonful in the bottle yet, and that 'ud do her finely. So just bring it home to her, there's a good boy, and bid her dhrink it straight off, the way she may git somethin' you may call a sleep, and as like as not be quit of the ugly toothache agin she wakes."

"There wouldn't be an atom of use biddin' her take it," said Cocky, "or anythin' else there wouldn't. I tould her of plinty of things to cure herself wid, but she won't touch e'er a one of them. As headstrong as can be she is over it. She's past *my* conthrol," Cocky asserted, solemnly, adopting a somewhat familiar phrase, not without enjoyment of it. "So you may be keepin' the little ould bottle." He was not quite sure whether he regretted or rejoiced to have this reason for rejecting Mrs Gildea's offer. Certainly

he did wish for his mother's cure ; but that it should be wrought by another person's advice and assistance, when his own was disregarded and disparaged, would have seemed a very undesirable fulfilment of his desire. On the whole, probably, he was glad of the excuse. But Mrs Gildea persisted. "Sure people do often be conthrairy like in themselves when they're sick," said she. "Its humourin' them one must be in a way. Wouldn't she be takin' e'er a sup of tay now?"

"And what else would I be fetchin' the wather for if it wasn't to boil the kettle?" said Cocky. "She says a hot sup might be apt to do her good."

"Well, thin, I'll tell you how you could conthrive. Just git her attintion disthacted a bit, and slip what's in the bottle, body and bones, into her cup, when she isn't lookin'. Ne'er a taste she'll get off it in the strong tay, but drink it down iligant unbeknownst, if you do the way I bid you, like a clever boy. And when you run home this evenin' you'll find she's after sleepin' beautiful all the while you were away, and sorra the talk of any more toothache," Mrs Gildea predicted, holding out the little bottle.

Cocky stood irresolute. The plan had an attractive aroma of practical joking, while the promise of a mother once more cheerful and laudatory was undeniably alluring ; but the conditions galled his professional pride.

"And you needn't ever be lettin' on I gave it to you, or anything about it," Mrs Gildea con-

tinued, "for very belike she might be mad wid us." This hint perceptibly strengthened Cocky's inclination towards compliance, for it showed that she did not propose to claim any credit from the cure, which seemed to him some amends for being unable to do so himself. Yet his jealous dread of a rival was a stubborn thing, and he hesitated still. Perhaps it would ultimately have prevailed with him, had not little Tim Daly happened just then to pass, pouring his soul, in rapt enjoyment, through a newly-acquired penny whistle. Tim's face, always of a rather comic full-moon pattern, was for the time being a caricature, because he had blown "the swoln cheek of a trumpeter;" and the sight of the grotesque profile somehow recalled to Cocky his mother's visage as he had last beheld it, distorted and woebegone. Whereupon he suddenly extended his hand, saying, "Gimme." He had resolved, not without an effort of difficult virtue, to try Mrs Gildea's remedy.

He was quite successful in administering it surreptitiously. By the simple device of yelling: "Och, look at what's goin' up the road!" he made himself an opportunity for tilting the contents of the little bottle into his mother's just-poured-out cup. It suited his purpose all the better that, in her indignation at what appeared to her his ill-timed pleasantry, she drank up her drugged tea with hurried and heedless gulps. Even so she alarmed him once by declaring that she "got an ugly onnathural sort of flavioir off

it." However, she accounted for this by supposing herself to have "lost the right taste of her mouth wid the tormentin' cowld she had in her unlucky teeth;" and though she left some spoonfuls in her cup, Cocky opined that she had swallowed enough to test the efficacy of those dark-trickling drops. His opinion was confirmed when he soon saw her begin to exhibit unmistakable signs of drowsiness, and heard her announce that "the two eyes of her were sinkin' into her head," and that as soon as he had run off to school, "she'd lie herself down on the bed to try could she get the chance of a sleep." So he sugared his slices of bread with a lavish hand, unreprieved, and started for Letterowen in a sanguine frame of mind.

Not long after his departure, Mrs Gildea knocked at the M'Canns' door. She knocked pretty loudly, and receiving no answer, stepped in, and rapped loudlier on the table. Then she coughed violently, and kicked a can standing on the floor so as to cause a sharp clatter. But finally, as the slumber whose depths she was gauging satisfactorily stood all these cautious trials, she stole swiftly up to the dresser, with its dangling jugs, and began a rapid groping behind it. "At the fut of the bed," she was thinking to herself, "Back of the dresser, in a little ould tay-caddy." But when in a few minutes she slipped quietly out again, nobody could have guessed the presence of a small, black japanned box hidden away under her shawl.

This was quite early in the day, a couple of hours at least before the sluggish midsummer sun had attained his noon ; but though the dusk had spread abroad out of every corner by the time that Mrs M'Cann had any more visitors, they found her still sleeping heavily. They were her near neighbours, Maggie Daly, and Anne Hunt, and Widow Kennan, who had come with such interesting news to tell and questions to ask that they shrilled and shook her into some sort of wakefulness after a while. But she remained so stupid and dazed that she took in at first only a small portion of the story they were relating. It was in substance that the two Gildeas had suddenly made a flitting, to the best of everybody's belief, for good and all. Tom Gildea had been seen setting off with himself and a bundle about sunrise that morn'ing, and the beholders had assumed that he was merely going on the *shaughraun*, according to his custom, for a day or two. Andy Cole, the letter-carrier, however, reported that about twelve o'clock he had met Mrs Gildea up beyond Dunathy tramping towards Oughterone, and likewise laden with a large bundle ; which had suggested a different significance for the movements of the pair. "So we was wonderin', ma'am," said Anne Hunt to Mrs M'Cann, "did Mrs Gildea herself happen to tell you they were quittin' when you was talkin' to her this mornin', for the Nolans let on she niver said a word to them of intendin' any such a thing."

"Is it Mrs Gildea?" Mrs M'Cann replied perplexedly. "I never seen sight nor light of her this day at all, let alone spakin' to her."

"Och, woman alive, is it in your sinses you are at all? Didn't meself and Mrs Kennan here see her comin' out of your door this mornin', wid our own eyes, and we hangin' up clothes?"

"Ay, bedad, did we," corroborated Widow Kennan. "It was no great while after Cocky goin' to school. Sure the woman's not rightly in her sinses."

"I dunno about thim," Mrs M'Cann said in bewilderment. "But if anybody come in, I wasn't mindin' them. Ever since I took me cup of tay at breakfast time me head's swimmin' off me shoulders, and ten strong men couldn't hould me eyes open. Ugly tay it was as ever I tasted."

Mrs Daly pounced swiftly upon the tea-cup, which was still standing on the table. "Goodness be wid us!" she exclaimed in continuation of a prolonged sniff, "it's lodnum she's after takin'—enough to poison the parish. Small blame to her to be bothered and stupid; the only wonder is that the life's left in her at all. Stand up on your feet, ma'am, this minyit, and keep stirrin' about, for it's lost you are if you fall off asleep agin. Sure, now, maybe the toothache had you distracted, but 'twas an awful thing to go take lodnum."

"Sorra the sup I took," Mrs M'Cann said,

standing up dizzily. "Glad of it I'd ha' been, but I hadn't got a drop to me name."

"Smell it, ma'am, smell it," Mrs Daly said, handing the cup round appealingly, and her companions both said, with confirmatory inhalations: "Lodnum it is."

"And some other stuff along wid it, I'm thinkin'," Mrs Daly said after further examination. "If it wasn't herself, it was that Cocky at his thricks agin, you may safely depind."

"The poor child wouldn't do such a thing," his mother said feebly, a protest which was not considered to call for notice.

"Where'd he get it?" Anne Hunt inquired more pertinently.

"I seen him colloquin' wid Mrs Gildea this mornin' early," Widow Kennan suggested, "outside of her door."

"Then, mark my words, it was that one gave it to him," said Mrs Daly, "and put it into his head to be poisonin' his poor mother's cup of tay wid it. She done it a-purpose, very belike, thinkin' to have the poor woman sleepin' stupid if anybody come in for to ransack the house on her, and she all alone in it by herself—the very way it happint. I'll bet you anythin' Tom Gildea and she had it settled up between them," Mrs Daly went on, skipping from conclusion to conclusion as nimbly as a series of dexterously-made ducks and drakes. "To be takin' off out of this to-day, wid whatever she was after grabbin'. A five-pound note, ma'am, she'd find

oncommonly handy, and you lyin' there as good as a block of wood all the while she was ferretin' about here."

"The five-pound note—och, to goodness, woman, don't say so," Mrs M'Cann said, pierced with dread through all her drowsiness. "Sure she doesn't know where I'm keepin' it."

"She'd get that aisy enough out of Cocky," said Mrs Daly; "and be the same token, here he is himself," she added, moving quickly towards the door.

So it befell Cocky, as he bolted headlong over his dusky threshold, to find himself obstructed by a matronly form, and sternly addressed: "Och, you *bould* boy! What for did you be poisonin' your poor mammy wid lodnum?" The object with which Mrs Daly had adopted this attitude and tone was completely gained by the result, for Cocky, so much taken aback that he thought only of self-defence, replied incriminatingly: "Git out of my road. It was nothin' but a weeny tint out of a little bottle Mrs Gildea gave me to make her get a wink of sleep."

Mrs Daly wheeled round triumphant upon her gossips: "What did I tell you? Ay, to be sure, she had her sleepin' rael convanient, while she herself was layin' hands on your fine five-pound note."

"Y' ould gaby," said Cocky, recovering his confidence. "Do you imagine or suppose I'd ha' tould her we had it in the tay-caddy if I didn't know me mother kep' the kay in her

pocket, that nobody can git at, or else yourself'd be as apt as any." But he was dismayed by a burst of derisive laughter. "Och, goodness pity the crathur," said Widow Kennan. "What differ does he think a kay makes in or out of a pocket when there's nothin' to hinder any person grabbin' the little box and away wid it?"

And through all the other voices struck one more thrilling as Mrs M'Cann, who had been groping behind the dresser, rose from her knees with a piercing wail: "Och, wirrasthrew, it's gone sure enough—there's the empty place it was in. She's took it while I was dead asleep, and we'll niver set eyes on it agin."

They never have from that good day to this. The loss, with its attendant circumstances, was intensely mortifying to Cocky M'Cann, and put him quite out of conceit with a medical career. Perhaps the most unpalatable draught in his cup of afflictions was the recital which he could not always avoid hearing his mother give to sympathetic neighbours; and the bitterest drops were always at the bottom, for she invariably wound up the narrative with: "But what I think baddest of was her makin' a fool that way of the innicent child."



A LINGERING GUEST

WHEN Mrs Van Herder died at her house on Marksville Avenue, New York, leaving a legacy of a hundred dollars to each servant who had been over three years in her employment, the Irish girl, Rose Byrne, could claim the bequest, having scrubbed the Van Herder floors for five long years ; and ten minutes after she heard of her good fortune she had firmly made up her mind what she would do with it : she would go home straight-way. Home for Rose lay across the Atlantic, on the storm-beaten shore of the County Donegal, and a dozen twelvemonths had passed since she had seen it except in dreams. If the legacy had come sooner she might, while waiting for the liner to sail, have spent much of her time and not a few of her dollars in the purchase of presents and fine clothes wherewithal to glorify her rejoining of her family circle. But by now so many a precious stone had dropped sadly out of that ring of hers, that she knew she would find only a small remnant safe in its setting. An old grandmother and a married sister were all the near relations left to welcome her back. This, and the prudence learned from experience, made her preparations

simple and thrifty. "I'm thinkin'," she said to herself, "that I'd do better to not be buyin' till I get home, for then I'll have a notion of what's wantin'. Buyin' things for them now is the same as puttin' the right kays into the wrong holes; there's naught amiss wid the kays themselves only they won't open them locks. The stores do be oncommon iligant and tasty, but sure I'll wait."

Rose, in fact was thinking that the things most wanted at home would probably be quite common, and not elegant at all; and when she reached Kilgowran she very soon saw that her conjectures were even righter than she had expected them to be. Her grandmother's white-walled, brown-thatched cabin, which looked like a weather-beaten mushroom on the wide dark bog, was in reality still more poverty-stricken than it had seemed in her memory. Partly, perhaps, because those lofty and spacious chambers over seas, which you could fill with clearest brilliance by a twirl of your finger and thumb, contrasted so strongly with this one dark little room, where the rafters slanted low above the uneven mud floor, and the shadows among them were seldom disturbed by anything brighter than a stray flicker glancing from the hearth. Its mistress had been old and gaunt as long as Rose could recollect, and was now, of course, older and gaunter than ever. Her decrepit, broken-down aspect struck Rose painfully as they sat opposite one another, soon after her arrival, on small, rough, creepy-stools, by

the crumbling glow of the turf-sods. It was a sad thing, she thought, to see an infirm old woman so poorly off that she had to wrap herself in a ragged greatcoat as she crouched huddled up uneasily over her fire, which she stirred with a broken spade-handle. Rose reflected with some consolation that to provide "a dacint warm shawl" was certainly in her power; "any sort of comfortable armchair" might be, she feared, beyond her means.

Since Rose's last sight of it, however, old Mrs Behan had added something to her little dwelling's scanty contents: another grandchild, namely, the orphan daughter of her son Peter, a slip of a girl just growing up. Maggie Behan was now nearly of the same age that Rose Byrne had been when quitting the bog-land of Kilgowran, and she looked very much as her cousin had done a dozen troublesome years ago. And it was not long before Rose perceived that Maggie occupied the position of prime favourite which had formerly been her own. This, indeed, became apparent on the very first evening, despite Rose's temporary distinction as a newly-returned traveller, and it was made unmistakably plain next morning, when Mrs Behan declared to Rose her opinion that there had never been a one of them all who could hold a candle to little Maggie for good looks, though the Behans were always as handsome a family as any in the countryside. An impartial judge would have seen nothing more remarkable in Maggie's round, cheerful face than that

pleasant freshness of early youth which the Irish people, possibly with a Danish reminiscence, call pig-beauty. So Rose knew well enough what was betokened by such extravagant praise. But she was not left merely to draw inferences. Their grandmother had a habit of expressing herself frankly, and accordingly she soon spoke her mind to Rose on this point. "Sure, now, you and me was always great, Rose, me dear," she said. "But little Maggie, the crathur, she's what the heart of me's fairly set on, and small blame to me, for her aquil wouldn't be aisy got. And bedad 'twas the same way ever; ne'er a word had I agin poor Norah, your mother, at all at all. But Pather was the lovely child—that's your poor uncle, Maggie's father—ay, indeed, I always had a wonderful wish for Pather."

Though it was scarcely in the nature of things that Rose should not feel somewhat aggrieved at finding herself thus superseded, circumstances helped her to take a philosophical view of the situation, saying to herself: "Why, it's only natural Granny'd think a deal of Maggie, that she's after bringin' up. And, sure, maybe the more she thinks of her the better these times, for who else is there to be stoppin' along wid her and mindin' her when she's gettin' so ould and feeble?" Therefore, as the days went past, Rose, keeping a watchful eye on significant trifles, was glad to see no lack on Maggie's part of due helpfulness and affection. "She'll be well looked after anyhow," she thought, as she observed her

young cousin's energetic "reddin' up" of the house-room, and good-humoured ways with the querulous old woman ; and once she spoke some of these sentiments aloud.

Her grandmother and she had walked across the bog to eleven o'clock Mass at Kilgowran Chapel, and were sitting to rest in the August sun on the low dilapidated wall of the chapel-yard. This Kilgowran burial-ground is a dreary, unrestful place, overlooked by the backs of several houses, and overgrown with tall, harsh green nettles and rusty brown docks. Among them the few grey stones, and the wooden crosses, plentier because cheaper, are sometimes nearly lost. These low, crookedly set crosses vary in hue from time to time, according to the different painting jobs that have been in progress thereabouts, as the leavings in a pot are often devoted to this purpose. A vivid canary was just then the prevailing colour. Mrs Behan surveyed them musingly as she and Rose sat to wait for Maggie, who had gone on a message, and she presently remarked : "I've no likin' for that yallery colour ; it's as ugly as sin. If it was me, I'd sooner a deal have the pink one there is yonder over young Andy FitzSimon. His father gave it a new coat the time he was doin' up Mr Purcell's front palin's a while ago. But, sure, how would poor Maggie be stickin' up crosses or anythin' else over me, the crathur, thry her best?"

"Maggie's a very good girl," Rose said, to

give the conversation a livelier turn. "I don't know what you'd do widout her."

But her commendation of her cousin, generally so eagerly taken up, had not the usual effect upon her grandmother. For instead of replying, "Ay, bedad," and launching out into complacent praises, Mrs Behan answered, firmly and gloomily : "I'd do first-rate ; grand I'd do, if I got the chance." An unexpected reponse, which surprised Rose considerably ; but Maggie's arrival just then prevented comment or explanation.

In the course of the next week Rose was again puzzled by some of her grandmother's sayings and doings. What perplexed her first was a marked disapprobation of the little purchases that she made for the benefit of the cabin and its occupiers. The sorely-needed garments or utensils or groceries never had a reception more gracious than : "Well, now, yourself's the great gaby to be bringin' home all them contrivances, litterin' up the place. 'Deed it's a pity to see you throwin' away your money on the likes of such ould thrash that nobody wants." Moreover, Mrs Behan's manner showed plainly that these protests were not merely polite disclaimers, but sincere utterances of her sentiments. Rose wondered and pondered without catching sight of any plausible reason. She well knew that none of her family had ever inclined towards excessive thrift, either on their own or other people's account. Stranger still, Mrs Behan began to let fall what sounded to Rose terribly like hints that she had outstayed

her welcome and had better end her visit. That this should have happened already, or, in truth, could happen ever at all, was a bitter thought to Rose ; and one night, after her grandmother had been talking about the sailing of steamers from Queenstown, she felt so badly that she ate hardly a morsel of supper, and went to bed early, almost resolved to leave next morning. But thereupon Mrs Behan had manifested such deep concern at these signs of indisposition, and had so bestirred herself to totter about, making tea and toast for the invalid, and scaring away intrusive hens whose crowing might disturb "her honey," that Rose found it for the time being impossible to harbour any longer those grievous suspicions.

Then one evening, on her return from the post-office, she discovered her grandmother alone in the kitchen. The old woman was stooping over the table, upon which she had spread out the contents of Rose's large wash-leather purse. Perceiving herself detected, she attempted first to conceal her occupation with a corner of her shawl, and next to assume an unabashed demeanour, failing in a pitable way that made Rose hasten to say gaily, accepting the scrutiny as a matter of course : " Well, Granny, it's fine and rich I am these times, amn't I ? " And, restored to self-respect, Mrs Behan spoke her mind without embarrassment. " Oh, bedad are you. But it's not very long before you won't be so. Five and ninepence you're after spendin' since this day week. You might as well be lettin' on to keep a sup of wather

in an ould sack as in your purse. Never your fool's fut you set outside the door but you'll throw away a couple of shillin's. Och, you needn't be offerin' to hide it: I see the big lump of a parcel you have under your arm this minyit. And the end of it 'ill be that before we know where we are the passage-money 'ill be gone. Look there," she said, pointing to the coins, which she had counted into two unequal heaps, "that's your fares on the boat, and that other's all you have left for wastin'; and it, by rights, you'll want to live on till you get places on the other side. But you'll keep it up, all I can do or say, till you'll not lave enough to take the two of yous over."

"The two of me, Granny?" Rose said. "Sure the dear knows it's lonesome entirely I'll be goin' across, and what for in the world would I be payin' the double fares?"

"Where's Maggie?" said Mrs Behan.

"*Maggie?*" said Rose. "And now what would bewitch me to be takin' Maggie away, and she the only one you have to be doin' e'er a hand's turn for over here?"

"Well enough I can be doin' meself all the hand's turns I want," said Mrs Behan. "What 'ud ail me to not? Haven't I got the hins? And I might be droppin' down off me standin' feet any minyit of the day, and then what 'ud become of little Maggie? It's the best chance for her altogether."

"Maggie'd be frettin' woeful if she was took

away from you," said Rose. "Ne'er a fut she'd come, it's my belief, and anyhow 'twould be no sort of thing to go do. I wouldn't be thinkin' of it at all."

They argued the point for a long time without change of opinion on either side, until at last Rose said: "Well, Granny, you know I'm goin' on Tuesday to stop a while wid me sister up at Clochranbeg, so 'twill be time enough to talk about Maggie when I come back. There's no hurry." And in this adjournment Mrs Behan had to acquiesce with what patience she could.

During her fortnight's visit to the struggling MacAteer family, away in the furthest corner of the wide county, Rose considered the question much and anxiously, with the result that on her journey back to Kilgowran she was sometimes repeating in her mind a decision at which she had reluctantly arrived. "I'll thry get a place in this counthry," she said to herself. "It's poor livin' and bad wages, and I well know the best way to lend them a helpin' hand is from across the wather. But how would Granny, the crathur, understand? And I'll promise her that if anythin' happins her I'll take Maggie back wid me then to the States. Maybe that 'ill contint her."

But Rose never gave that promise. For when she reached the little brown and white cottage in the black bog she found it more lonesome within than without; and running in affright to the Dohertys, it's far-off nearest neighbours, she heard the worst news. Mrs Doherty, looking

scared and solemn, related how, the evening after Rose left, Mrs Behan had asked them to take in Maggie for a little while, as she herself was real bad and going into Ballymoyle Infirmary. And how on that day week, when Jim Doherty had tramped over to inquire for her, he heard that she was dead and buried. "Took very suddint, the crathur, God be good to her!" Mrs Doherty said, "or to be sure she'd send word by some manner of manes to poor Maggie that she set such store by, and that's sittin' here in desolation in the corner ever since, as quiet as a bird hunted out of its sivin sines."

Maggie did indeed look so wan and woebegone that Rose's first thought was: "She'd never ha' been persuaded to come away wid me. If I had but known I might ha' promised to take her safe enough, instead of to be vexin' poor Granny wid goin' against the notion; and I'd liefer than a great deal I had so." However, she was obliged to mingle active exertions with the regret that made them all dreary and wearisome. She could not afford to linger, lest her little fortune should actually, as poor Granny had dreaded, dwindle away, leaving her without the means of paying her cousin's passage. That Maggie must now accompany her was obvious, for "Who else would be mindin' the girl?" and Maggie herself had apparently no wishes one way or the other. So Rose hastened to make their preparations before the waning autumn became stormier winter, and the long amber rays, which seemed stooping to peer

in under thatched eaves at little low windows, should be all lost among clouds and mist.

One thing that she did gave some small consolation to Maggie and herself. She bespoke a wooden cross for their grandmother's grave from Jim Doherty, who was a great hand at carpentry. Jim at first made some demur about accepting the commission, on the grounds that he might be "bothered to find the right grave there promiscuous in the Union corner." But in the end he consented, and refused to take a farthing for his work, and promised to paint the cross a fine, strong pink, and if possible at all to set it in the proper place, though about this he still expressed doubts. So Rose entrusted Mrs Doherty with the key of the deserted cabin till Mrs MacAteer could take possession of its few effects, and she and Maggie said farewell to Kilgowran.

The cousins voyaged safely to New York, and were fortunate enough to get situations there in the same household. One day, soon after Rose had reported their arrival to Mrs Doherty at Kilgowran, she received an Irish letter, which she and Maggie spelled out with bewildered amazement at first, and finally with almost incredulous joy. It was written by the Kilgowran school-master, from the dictation evidently of more than one person, which made its style rather involved and obscure, as we may perceive :—

"Dear Rose, and Maggie, jewel machree, that has no call to be fretting all the while. Sure, now,

Rose, you needn't be mad wid me, for the only plan I could contrive to get you out of it was to take off wid meself to the Infirmary as soon as I got your back turned, for then I well knew you wouldn't be long quitting yourself, and bringing little Maggie wid you. So I bid Jim Doherty let on I was the ould woman they were after burying there on Friday. But afraid of me life I was lest he wouldn't have the wit to be telling you the right lies.—Dear Miss Rose Byrne, you can bear me witness that ne'er a word of truth I told you good or bad, except saying I couldn't tell the very place the grave was, and small blame to me for that same, when Herself is sitting here by her fire this minyit, and well able to be giving impidence as ever she was in her life. But I mean to let you know I didn't go back of me promise about the cross, no fear. A grand little one it is, and I have it painted as pink as a rose, the way it had a right to be. Dear Miss Byrne, so when I brought it over to her just now—”

“The big *stookawn* he was to go do such a thing,” Rose commented on reading this.

“—nothing else would suit her but I must stick it up for her on the wall alongside of her dresser, and an iligant apparence it has. I may say Mr Joseph Gogarty, the National School teacher, is in a great admiration of it altogether. (I am glad to state that I consider the memorial cross a neatly-made and tastefully-constructed article.—J. G.)—

Indeed now, Rose, yourself was a very good girl to think of spending your money on it, if Jim Doherty would let you, and there will I be keeping it, dry and convenient, till whenever I want it, please God ; and then Jim Doherty will see there will be no mistake about where it's put in the burying-ground. And, Maggie, alanna, you will be getting on finely in the States ; and don't be lonesome, me jewel, for there do be no chances in Kilgowran, and sure the hins is grand company to me. So no more at present from your grandmother, Honoria Behan, and Jim Doherty."

"Saints above, but herself's the great rogue, glory be to goodness," Rose said when they had at last puzzled out the real state of affairs. "And rightly she got the better of me that time, and quare fools she made of the two of us, that were frettin' ourselves distracted, and she just waitin' ready to flourish up out of her bed like an ould cricket leppin', and back again wid her into her little house as soon as she had us safely landed on board. But all the same, it's wonderin' I am, Maggie, if she isn't apt to be lost entirely widout either of us."

"I'll save hard," said Maggie. "Wid such a power of dollars in me wages it won't be a great while till I have enough to get back to her. Ah, Rose dear, me heart's cold to think of her sittin' there wid that ould pink cross stuck up on the wall. But, please God, that's where I'll find it yet

when I get home to her ; and then I'll not be long takin' it down."

And at the present time Maggie is still saving hard, and the pink cross still hangs on the wall beside her grandmother's dresser.

LOUGHNAGLEE

MRS MOLLY WHELEHAN told the story to her grand-daughter, Helena Mahony, much as she herself had heard it from her own grandmother, who, having lived at the very time and place of its end, "had a right," as Mrs Whelehan said, "to know the whole of it." They were seated on a fine swarded bank by the northern shore of Loughnaglee, and resting, that is to say Helena was resting, for her grandmother seemed just as fresh and brisk as when they had set out two or three hours before, which was absurd. For Helena had been quite lately sent to stay with her, because a family conclave had decided that "the crathur was gettin' a great age entirely, and too ould and feeble to be left any longer livin' her lone." Whereas now, the day but one after Helena's arrival, her grandmother had nearly "tramped the two feet off of her," gathering rushes to patch the roof of the calf's shed from breakfast-time till noon.

Loughnaglee is set in level green land, with low shores, except at its northern end, where a little hill range sends down a spur to the water's edge, overlooking it with a bold, furzy crag,

lifted on a pedestal of steep grass slopes. Beneath this run very tall blackthorn hedges, which here enclose the dwindled lake-corner, turning to either hand in symmetrically right lines and angles, so that it is like a small court, with three high, thick walls. Its water-floor generally lies in shadow, looking sombrely solid and opaque, as if paved with black flags, even when the rest is all shimmering blue or silver. Perhaps this gloomy aspect may have conspired with an echo born of the cliff to suggest and foster the belief whence Loughnaglee has come by its name—the Lake of the Cries : but no one has so far found or invented any legend to explain its origin.

Wide shadow fell heavily on the water as the old woman and the girl sat by it, close to the last sloe bush on the eastern shore ; for although it was midsummer and midday everything scowled back sympathetically and unseasonably at the lowering cloud-canopy overhead. "If it's trampin' round Loughnaglee as often as meself you were," Mrs Whelehan said as they sat down and her grand-daughter complained of being "kilt," "it's little enough you'd think of steppin' as far as the Fivestones for a bundle of rushes. But sure we can be restin' here aisy for a bit, till it's time to go in and put on the pitaties. And bedad if any people was livin' all their lives beside it as long as I am, they wouldn't have so much talk out of them about the quare things there do be on the lough. Ne'er a sign of them I seen anyway."

"I wouldn't suppose it was any quarer than

e'er another little ould lough," said Helena, who being momentarily out of humour threw some disparagement into her tone.

"For the matter of that," replied the grandmother, promptly changing front, "them that never set fut next nor nigh it till last Monday isn't very apt to have any great opinion about the quareness that might or mightn't be in it. Sure it's much if they know the raison it got the name Loughnaglee on it at all."

"It had to be called some name, I should suppose," said Helena, who was still inclined to suppose perversely, "and one's as good as another."

"Well now, indeed and bedad, the people were fine fools if they'd no better sort of raison than that when they called it the Lough of the Cries in the Gaelic," said Mrs Whelehan. "But there's some could be tellin' you a different story, and a one that's no lie either, to me certain knowledge."

"Could they so?" said Helena, who had been cooling her hands and face with the clear water and felt her curiosity revive.

"But before ever that happint," said Mrs Whelehan, "I was hearin' tell about the cries. For they do say that if a man's anywheres convenient to the lough, sittin' here beside it, maybe, or up a bit on the hill, and if he hears anythin' cryin' and callin' him by his name, he may depend there's some harm after befallin' the woman he sets the most store by in this world, whoever she may be—his mother, or his wife, or his child, or

his sweetheart, just accordin', though it's far enough away she was all the while."

"To be sure, then, that's rael quare," said Helena. "I wonder is it the truth?"

"You'll be wonderin' a long time before you make a bowl of stirabout wid it," Mrs Whelehan said oracularly, "but very belike your mammy was tellin' you agin now what happint me grandmother's brother in the same identical place we're sittin' in this minyit, I might say."

"She was not," said Helena. "No great talk of Loughnaglee she has these times. Only a slip of a *girsheach* she says she was and she gettin' married and quittin' out of it."

"Herself hasn't much nathur in her to be dis-remimberin' it, if she was twinty *girsheachs*. But I niver had any such great wish, so to spake, for Biddy," Mrs Whelehan said frankly. "She always took after her poor father's ould sister, Nellie Whelehan, that was as contrairy as a wild hin. However, what happint me grandmother's brother, Jim M'Farlane, was before my time, when they were all livin' in the empty house fornint me own, and the Cavanaghs were in the next one, that's gone to ruin. And the ould people were very wishful to be makin' up a match wid Jim M'Farlane and Norah Cavanagh, the only daughter. Me grandmother said she knew Norah had a likin' ever for Jim, and Jim had nothin' agin it, till Mrs Cavanagh's niece, Rose Moore, come to stop wid them, and then he seemed takin' a notion he might be better satisfied

if he got her. Just for the sake of variety, for me grandmother said she wasn't any nicer than Norah, unless that might be the raison. But too young he was to be firm in his mind. However, he was betwixt and between, and they had nothin' settled this way or that way, when the two girls took it in their heads one day to go pull sloes along the hedge here, that were just turned black. It was the grand hedge for sloes, and bedad it's full of them this minyit, if they were ripe. The white blossom on it does be a sight to behold at the turn of the winter, and the sloes do be the size of young plums, wid a bloom on them you could write your name in. Grand wine they make. So off they set in the mornin', and when they came here they found Jim M'Farlane up on the hill there wid his tarrier after rabbits, and they only passed him the time of day, and that was all. And Rose went wid her basket along this lough side of the hedge, and Norah over yonder"—Mrs Whelehan pointed across the smooth dark water—"where there's somethin' of a steep bank.

"Well now, after a while Jim was mindin' the dog that had him nearly bothered altogether wid the barkin' and yelpin' it kep' up at a rabbit hole; but all the same it seemed to him he heard somethin' callin' his name wid a woeful screech. And says he to himself: 'That's Rose Moore about drowndin' herself as sure as the sun's in the sky.' And off wid him to the place he'd seen her goin'. But there she was, pullin'

away on the field side of the hedge, and sorra a pin's points amiss wid her, and ne'er a bit of her was after callin' him, or hearin' anythin' only the little dog barkin' and yellin'. Howane'er he stood out that some person was screechin' in it, and they looked through the hedge here to try was there any signs of Norah over there. And at first they seen nothin', but prisintly they noticed a white strake on a bush opposite, like as if a bough was wrenched off it; and the next minyit they seen a white strake agin' in the black wather, and what was that but poor Norah's apern, and she floatin' across to them on the set of the current? So Jim got her on shore by some manner of manes, but the breath was out of her body entirely. And the crathur had the thorn bough clutched in her hand, the way they knew she was houldin' on to it till it broke, and callin' to Jim, and he runnin' off from her after Rose Moore, that naught ailed in the world."

"Then she needn't lose her life only for him bein' mistook that way?" said Helena.

"She need not, goodness may pity her. And only for him havin' the story in his head about the callin' it's well enough he'd know Norah's voice, that he was used to all the days of his life. So if there's no raison for what people do be sayin' about the lough, get me a one. There was raison enough to drownd the poor girl anyhow. But what I hope in me heart is that the crathur wasn't seein' Jim, and he startin' off and lavin' her that thought so much of him, for the

sake of goin' to Rosey Moore. She might aisy catch sight of him through the hedge leppin' down the hill, and 'twould be fit to break her heart."

"Sure if she was to be drowneded the next minyit, that 'ud be the less matter," said Helena. "'Twould make no differ to her then."

"It's little the likes of you or anybody else knows what mightn't make a differ," said her grandmother. "Some folks do be sayin' she didn't die contint—God be good to her—and wasn't restin' aisy. I mind meself hearin' ould Christy Nolan and Judy Dunne sayin' that long ago they seen— 'Twas about the time of Jim and Rose's weddin', for they got married after all ; but me grandmother said Rose wouldn't look at him for a great while she was that mad wid him for lettin' Norah be drowneded."

"What did they see?" said Helena.

"Ah, me dear, accordin' to my opinion there wasn't an atom of truth in it. The Cavanaghs were very dacint, respectable people. I niver heard tell of e'er another one of them walkin'. And forby that, more betoken, look at all the years I'm livin' alongside the lough, and sight nor light I seen of e'er such a thing, in the daytime at anyrate, and nobody has any call to be rovin' about in the night. If they see anythin' quare then, they've themselves to thank for it. I don't believe—"

"Och, what was that?" Helena gripped her grandmother's arm and shrank behind her, as a

croaking chuckle approached them, breaking into a laughter-like skirl, while a snowy gleam appeared, crossing over the murky water.

"Sure only the big gull," said Mrs Whelehan, pointing up to the wide white wings as they sailed by. "But it's no good sign for the weather when that sort come streelin' in so far from the say, and bedad I think there's a shower blowin' up on the win' this instant. So we'd do better to be stirrin' ourselves, till we get home dry."

Indeed the first large drops were stamping circles on the capable water, and ripples were rising and reeds bending to rub them out, as Mrs Whelehan went with Helena home. The old woman was considering that she must fetch in a creel of turf before the day turned out too entirely soft on her. But her grand-daughter's thoughts were occupied somewhat fearfully with the story she had just been told. It seemed to her that life at lonely Loughnaglee would henceforth have one more shadow, thrown by the fate of Norah Cavanagh, who "didn't die contint."

MORIARTY'S MEADOW

FOR some time Johnny Quin of Letterard had been looking over the low stone wall at his bit of young oats, which you could almost see grow in the midsummer sunshine, when he was pulled by the sleeve, and, turning round, beheld little Joe O'Hea with a grey kid tugging at the other end of a string.

"Johnny, man," said Joe, "couldn't you take and give the baste a lift up there for me? She'd get grand grazin' on it." Joe spoke remonstrantly, as if Johnny had been neglecting an obvious duty; and he pointed to the roof of Felix Moriarty's cabin, which stood just across the lane.

The cabin was very small, with one tiny window-pane in its mud-walls, which were deeply weather-stained under the eaves, and from which the whitewash had worn off, leaving large brown patches. But its worst point, considering it as a dwelling-house, was the roof, for the thatch undulated in hillocks and hollows, and also bore a luxuriant crop of grass, almost as long and thick and green as the thriving oats over the way. This seemed to little Joe a desirable pasture for his kid, whose browsings along the stone-dyked lane were

but scanty, and hence his appeal to his taller friend.

Johnny, however, was of a different opinion, and replied : "Sure not at all. The crathur's over small sized to be cockin' up that height off the ground. It's breakin' her four legs she's apt to be before you'd get her down safe. Or belike she'd be losin' herself in the long grass. Or maybe it's puttin' his roof up for a meadow Moriarty is all the while. Ay, bedad, you may depind that's what he's doin'. So just keep along the road wid her steady, me son, and niver mind anythin' growin' where she's no call to be trespassin'." Accordingly Joe and the kid sauntered on, leaving Johnny to his oats.

But Johnny's attention had caught on Felix Moriarty's thatch, and did not disengage itself quickly. His own pleasantry, too, about Moriarty's meadow had taken his fancy, and he continued to repeat and elaborate it in his thoughts. At last, the forenoon being long and employment scarce, he actually went so far as to climb, sickle in hand, up on the waving roof, where he was presently slashing vigorously.

"Bedad now," he said, surveying the tufts which had fallen round him, "I'm after knockin' that same down in fine style : I did so, and wasn't long about it either." Nor did he stop here.

Having raked together the crop, and added a few bundles of grass from the bank, he carefully built up on an inconveniently sloping base a symmetrical little cock. This he secured with a

rope scientifically twisted of the withered bents along the border of his oats, and then, jumping down noisily into the lane, contemplated his handiwork with complacent pride. Only one element was wanting in his satisfaction with it. There were no spectators to share his amusement and admire his wit. The key of the locked cabin door lurked hidden in some crevice of the thatch, for Felix Moriarty was away at the haymaking in a district where work seemed less slack. Nobody was about in the neighbouring fields. Even Joe O'Hea and the kid were out of sight round the corner.

"Sure now it's a grand joke," Johnny repeated to himself more than once, "and it looks as comical as anythin' sittin' there up over the man's door as if it consaited it was in the middle of a sivin-acre field. Anybody 'ud be laughin' at it that seen it, passin' by."

But of passers-by there appeared to be small prospect, as this lonely upland lane led no-whither in particular, and the nearest dwelling was merely his own cottage, the topmost thatch of which peered just visibly over the edge of a long slope.

"It 'ill be twinty pities," Johnny declared, "twinty pities and a half if nobody sees it before it's blew away wid the win'." At that moment all these pities sadly threatened to come about.

Still Johnny had a daring and ingenious turn of mind. Early the next morning, in Rathbeg, a village some few miles from Letterard, much excitement was awakened by the discovery of

certain handbills which had been posted up on walls and doors in several conspicuous places. They were white foolscap sheets, written upon in a large round hand to the following effect :—

*Men of Rathbeg ! Assemble in your Thousands
this Saturday evening to Mow the Meadow of
the evicted Tenant, Felix Moriarty, on the Town-
land of Gortramakilleen at Letterard. Down
with Tyrants !*

These placards must have been affixed during the night, and nobody in Rathbeg knew anything about the matter, a secrecy which, together with the shortness of the notice given, suggested that some peculiar urgency in Felix Moriarty's affairs made it expedient to render him the required assistance without incurring the observation of the constabulary. Such a state of things was not by any means unprecedented, and would in itself strongly dispose the men of Rathbeg to be active on his behalf, although none of them were acquainted with Moriarty except vaguely by name, or indeed knew much more about little, out-of-the-way Letterard than that it had for proprietor an ill-reputed landowner. On the other hand most people were just then too busy getting in their hay to spare easily even the fag-end of the lingering daylight, especially as the unsettled aspect of the weather made every dry hour doubly precious. And to be sure, it was a long step from Rathbeg to Letterard. Hence there

were abundant materials, for the debate which was carried on in and about Finucane's public for a considerable time after the finding of the summons.

Theig Ahern, the village orator, urged eloquently that it would be a good job to lend anybody a helping hand "against the likes of such a notorious, ould, black-hearted, naygurly, exterminatin', widow-robbin', childer-starvin' miscreant of a land-grabber as ould Warden, himself and his sheriff's writs." But then Timothy Dolan argued briefly, yet effectively, that there were plenty of as good jobs, and better, to be done in their own bits of fields, without tramping half a dozen miles over the country after them. The hearers who said "Ay, bedad," and "Thrue for you," to this sentiment seemed nearly as numerous as those who received it with murmurs of "mane-spirited" and "unmanly." So the issue remained doubtful.

Meanwhile, the originator of the discussion, seated at his favourite post on the wall of his Letterard oat-field, was speculating about the result. Not many hours had passed since Johnny Quin had made his way home under the waning moonlight, through dewy fields, from his stealthy bill-sticking at Rathbeg. He had himself composed and written and copied the notices overnight in the emptied National schoolroom, with some assistance from his old friend, Peter Cleary, the teacher, to whom he did not communicate their contents. Mr Cleary, however, though he

preferred to be discreetly ignorant, may have guessed at their purport from the words which he was occasionally called upon to spell. "Och not at all, Johnny. There does be but one *r* in 'tyrant,' and all the *i*'s you have is a *y* and an *a*. You always made an oncommon bad offer at the orthography."

And now Johnny, blinking half-drowsily in the sunshine, spent most of the day in looking forward hopefully to the success of his plot. It had occurred to him yesterday, when enjoying his own wittiness embodied in the absurd haycock, and feeling how much that enjoyment would be enhanced by the presence of spectators. To assemble these by a stratagem which would "raise the laugh on them" for coming was a project with a twofold charm, and it fully occupied his mind from the moment of its first conception until he had evolved and, so far as lay in his power, carried out all the details.

If he had been asked what he expected to gain in case things happened as he hoped, he might have truthfully replied, a fine shindy entirely, for that outcome was undoubtedly uppermost in his anticipations. Suppose that a dozen or so of the Rathbeg men were moved by his bogus summons to tramp over with their scythes in the evening, and, upon arriving, found their job was nothing more than simply the removal of the pygmy cock from its ridiculous site. "Bejabers, it's ragin' mad they all 'ill be as sure as sure," Johnny said, chuckling as he rehearsed the scene. "'Where's

Moriarty's meadow that's evicted?' says they, 'and that we're come to mow for?' 'Is it, where is it?' says I. 'Musha, where else but here,' I says—for on the roof I'll be—'up over your fools' heads. And I'll bet me brogues it's the quarest little meadow ever a man was evicted out of,' says I. Leppin' they'll be."

About the incidents of this promising fray Johnny felt no anxiety at all. He did not, of course, propose to encounter the exasperated visitors quite single-handed. The stir of their advent would, he knew, bring plenty of the neighbours flocking to see what was up, and there would be no lack of Letterard lads to side with him. What did cause him some uneasiness was the doubt whether any party would actually come. His appeal might have been disregarded. The Rathbeg farmers might be too busy for such expeditions; or they might know enough about Letterard affairs to be aware that there was in reality no talk of evicting Felix Moriarty, and so perceive the hoax. For this reason Johnny kept his own council, lest the failure of his joke should "raise the laugh" on *him*.

But while the sunset was still unfurling in the west a wide fan of pink-flushed feathery cloudlets, which seemed to be waving off a misty little moon, like a white rose-leaf, fluttering up out of the faint green east, Johnny's fears were dispersed by what he deemed a very joyful sight. From his coign of vantage he espied coming up the lane something which he presently ascertained to be a

troop of men, several among whom carried scythes or sickles. And, more than this, along with them moved a brilliant blue and scarlet object, drawn by a pair of horses.

"Glory be! if it isn't a mowin'-machine they're after bringin'!" he said in high delight. "Well now, that bangs Banagher." And he laughed so uncircumspectly that he almost lost his footing on the slope of Moriarty's thatch, to which he had mounted. A mowing-machine it was, the fact being that Theig Ahern, the orator, in the absence of his elder brother, a well-to-do farmer, had taken upon himself, contrary to advice, to borrow it for the demonstration against the evictors.

With his torn straw hat flapping in the gusty breeze, Johnny stood up tall beside his dumpy haystack, and surveyed the approach of the calvacade, smiling his broadest smile. But there were no smiles on the faces that looked up at him. The party from Rathbeg were by this time distinctly out of humour. They had failed to get any satisfactory information about Moriarty's meadow from the following of unoccupied gossoons whom their progress had attracted, and this led them to apprehend that they had somehow blundered about the road. No suspicion of a trick had as yet occurred to them; but they were not by any means in a mood to take one in good part.

Therefore when Johnny, grinning more broadly than ever, replied to inquiries: "Is it Moriarty's meadow you was lookin' for? Sure amn't I meself standin' on it before your eyes? And

a grand big one it is. Only I dunno will yous find it very handy drivin' your pair-horse yoke into it. Maybe it's lucky I done the mowin' meself," his answer evoked looks and language sufficiently threatening to make him glance round rapidly, singling out the friendly faces, as he took a firmer grip of the sturdy blackthorn, which he had providently hidden behind the haystack.

An excited parley ensued, growing momentarily angrier and louder, while Farmer Ahern's fiery chestnuts fumed and fidgeted, spurning the rough road, and flashing the set blades of their machine in restless starts to and fro. Then on a brief pause a voice rose clear and shrill. It proceeded from little Dan Molloy, who had perched himself on a wall adjoining the cabin, and it said,—

"Sure, now, if *he's* so fond of mowin'" — Dan pointed to Johnny — "mightn't you take your fine yoke in there" — he pointed across to the open gate of Johnny's oat-field — "and give it a turn through his bit of oats?"

This suggestion, which was received with an assenting laugh, roused acute horror in Johnny, such peril did it threaten to his thriving crop, the very core of his hope and pride. Down he hurled himself with a clatter to prevent the outrage, aiming, as he passed, at the mischievous visage of Dan Molloy a resentful cuff, which Dan adroitly ducked. But Johnny's action only precipitated the event he was dreading. For the restless horses, scared by his abrupt rush towards their

heads, broke away from all control and bolted straight into the field.

Alas for the lovely young oats as four pairs of galloping hoofs and a pair of wide-rimmed iron wheels burst wildly into them, followed by a throng of trampling feet which wrought hardly less grievous havoc. Every moment was destroying among the soft green blades and haulms with their silken ears the work of many days' sunshine and dewy air, when suddenly, before the careering runaways had been brought to a standstill, another yet more alarming object diverted the attention of their pursuers.

Johnny's reserve on the subject of his jest had known one exception, very unfortunately for his confidante's peace of mind. She was his mother, a little old widow woman, prematurely aged and crippled by rheumatism, so that she had to be carried to and fro between her bed and her arm-chair, her only journeys. Her son Johnny was most kind to her. It had been with the best intentions that he enlivened their morning meal by telling her all about the grand trick he had just played on the Rathbeg lads, and how infuriated they would be when they landed over with their scythes to cut nothing good or bad, and what a laugh it would raise on them, and what a splendid row was certain to follow. "It's much," he said, "if somebody's head isn't broke over it." And then he had gone off whistling in the highest spirits, leaving little Mrs Quin a prey to the blackest forebodings.

All the long, lonely day she brooded uninterruptedly upon the dreadful possibilities of the coming encounter, in which crooked, shining scythe-blades, wielded by rash and wrathful hands, might play a part as fatal as if they were flashes from a murky cloud. "They'll be murderin' one another up there," she said to herself, "and me sittin' here all the while like an ould tabby-cat in comfort by the chimney-corner, and no abler to do a hand's turn agin' it."

Johnny's fear that nobody might come formed her sole hope, and of that she was bereft about the pink sunset time, when little Joe O'Hea ran in to her with a jug of sour milk and the news that he had just seen a great lot of men carrying scythes, and a quare big yoke of a mowin'-machine going along up the lane towards Felix Moriarty's. At these tidings Mrs Quin's heart sank. Then her mind swiftly caught at and grasped a desperate resolution. "Joe, sonny," she said to Joe, who was on the point of racing off for another view of the remarkable machine, "do you see that bucket of wather?" It was a zinc bucket set brimful near the door. "I want you," she continued, "to take a couple of standin' leps in the middle of it."

"But sure, ma'am, wouldn't I be splashin' it all over the floor and dhrowndin' everythin'?" Joe objected, amazed.

"Never you mind, sonny; do as I bid you like a good boy. Lep away, and I'll give you a penny," said Mrs Quin. Whereupon Joe, al-

though still puzzled, by no means loth, did jump so energetically that the contents of the bucket were speedily dispersed in sparkling showers, a bountiful share of which thoroughly drenched his own garments.

"That's an iligant child," Mrs Quin said approvingly, "ne'er a dhry stitch there's on you at all. Now come here till I tell you what else I'm wantin' you to do. You know, Joey, it's a terrible wicked thing," she went on impressively, as he stood by her, dripping and expectant, "it's a terrible wicked, dangerous thing for childer to get meddlin' wid the fire."

"*I don't ever meddle wid it,*" Joe hastened to protest. "Biddy and Paddy does be at it of an odd while, and I do be biddin' them let it alone and not be burnin' themselves up."

"To be sure, avic, to be sure, so you would. But now, just for this very once, and you're to not ever go do such a thing again *at all* in the len'th of your life's days, I want you—may goodness forgive me—to take the little matchbox you'll find behind the blue jug on the dresser, and run out to the back of the house, where you can aisy raich to the thatch from the high bank of the field, and strike a few of the blue heads of the matches, jewel, on the rough side of the box—och but I'm the ould sinner!—and stick them lightin' into the thatch here and there, as if you was stickin' pins in a pincushion, and you'll see the fine flare-up there'll be directly. It's as dry as tinder."

This commission was surprisingly to the taste of six-year-old Joe. "And what more'll I do after that, ma'am?" he said, eager for further agreeable instructions. "There's the pigsty—"

"Sure, then, you might be runnin' up the field and screechin' fire and thieves and all manner," said Mrs Quin; "it's a sort of game, you see."

But as Joe gleefully darted out, armed with the small yellow box, she shook her head stiffly. "Och now meself's the wicked ould woman. But deed it's murdherin' themselves they'd be—and Johnny. And if I sent them only a message," she argued, "sure they might be apt to think the crathur was romancin', and just keep on fightin'; but seein's believin'. And the child's drippin' wet, forby his clothes bein' woollen every thread. He couldn't set himself alight anyhow. May goodness forgive me. It's killin' me his poor mother had a right to be for puttin' such divilment in the crathur's head."

So we can easily understand how it came to pass that in the midst of chasing the driverless mowing-machine several people became aware of a thick smoke column rising on the edge of the slope below them, and of red flames shooting up through the blue cloud, growing rapidly stronger and brighter in the faded daylight. At the same time they observed a small figure rushing about with shrill shrieks in the adjacent field. Joe, in fact, had been so much scared by the sudden huge blaze of the dry thatch that he performed his screaming lustily.

Among the first to see was Johnny Quin. "Mercy around!" he said, "there's our house blazin' wild, and Herself inside it."

He outstripped all the others in their rush down-hill, and reached the scene of the conflagration none too soon, for the kitchen was a smother of smoke, through which wisps of fiery straw had already begun to drop fiercely about the helpless old woman as she sat distracted by conflicting terrors. She could hardly realise her relief when she found herself where she could breathe and see, and in the arms of her Johnny safe and sound.

Nevertheless the mother and son spent that night uncomfortably enough, huddled in a corner of their devastated dwelling, under an extemporised shelter of potato-sacks, while all around them hummed and plashed through their charred rafters the drops of a downpour which had arrived just too late to save their roof. Johnny sat in mournful meditation.

"Well now," he said at last, "it's quare bad luck. There's me oats destroyed, that was grand, and the machine smashed, and the horse's leg cut woeful, and our bit of good thatch ruined over our heads—and all wid intendin' a joke."

"It's on your knees you ought to be, me lad," said Mrs Quin, the incendiary, "thankin' goodness that the feet of you aren't raped off wid them hijjis slashin' scythes, and meself not burned into ashes and cinders schemin' to purvint yous doin' murder, instead of talkin' about bad luck."

But Johnny's gratitude remained undemonstra-

tive. "I'm thinkin'," he said, "it's a fool's work to be raisin' a laugh on any people. For you never can rightly tell what else mayn't take and rise up along wid it. Ay, bedad—and apter than not somethin' you won't like."

DELAYED IN TRANSMISSION

WHEN anybody in Meenaclochran gives a party, the word which goes round to bid the neighbours often has far to travel over the wide bog-land, and is conveyed by very miscellaneous messengers, all manner of wayfarers being pressed into the service. This was especially often the case with the Nolans and the M'Nultys, two of the most sociably-disposed families in the place, and living remotely at opposite ends of the spacious and lonesome Cregganmore bog. Both households, however, comprised lively young people, while both were a shade or so more prosperous in their farming than is common in that district, and owned the warmest hearths and the widest floors. Consequently, among circumstances thus propitious, it was not likely that the obstacles merely of long miles and rough walking would prove insuperable when either wished to let the other know "there would be dancing in it" on such or such a night. As they were on most friendly terms they of course took care that the dates of their entertainments should not clash; but everybody knows how difficult it occasionally is to prevent this, and not long ago, by a chapter of those accidents

which will sometimes happen, Dinny Breen and John Hickey met on Tackaberry's Bridge, Dinny charged with an invitation from the Nolans to the M'Nultys, and John with one from the M'Nultys to the Nolans, both for the same Saturday evening.

Tackaberry's Bridge is about half way between the two white farmhouses, humping itself up in an abrupt, ungainly loop, like a travelling caterpillar, over the Murna River, which flows through the middle of the bog. Though roughly built it shows more traces of design, such as it is, than the rest of the road, which seems just a track worn by feet choosing the firmest ground as they go to and fro. Stepping-stones occur here and there, and are found convenient by pedestrians in soft weather, but naturally tend to discourage any other kind of traffic.

As Dinny Breen sat now on the low parapet under the only little tree, a stooping willow, visible far and wide, he looked down into the clear brown water and said: "If the both of them has company axed for the one night, it stands to reason that naither of them could be goin' out in any case. So there's no great good in me trampin' on all the way to M'Nulty's."

"There is not, bedad," said John Hickey. "Nor in meself, for the matter of that, to be mindin' about lavin' word wid the Nolans."

"Because," said Dinny, "this is a very handy day to be borryin' the gun off Pat Kelly, when we have the dogs along, and the polis are away wid

themselves to Loughmore Petty Sessions. A race's runnin' on the whole of them."

"True for you ; they are so bedad," said John.

The last-named consideration was an important one, owing to the fact that neither the proposed borrowers nor lender happened to possess a licence, which made immunity from the chance of encounters with inquisitive patrols appear a highly desirable feature in an afternoon's sport. Accordingly, the opportunity was pronounced too good to be thrown away, and the two faithless youths were soon happily engaged among bogholes and tussocks, and heathery boulders and golden-burning furze bushes, with no further thought of Nolans or M'Nultys.

Anyone whose experience has lain in places like Meenaclochran will understand how improbably large an amount of good luck would be needed to keep the news of an entertainment from the ears of an uninvited neighbour. No such exceptional quantity intervened on this occasion. Very little *contrariness* of things, on the other hand, commonly suffices to ensure the worst possible complexion being put on the matter ; and that was now amply supplied. A few unfortunate remarks from tactless or ill-disposed acquaintances, a few slight misrepresentations, inadvertent or otherwise, and the thing was done. The seeds of offence were safely sown and might be trusted to thrive apace. Only a short growing space was wanted to ripen the conviction alike of Nolans

and M'Nultys that they had been treated by each other with black ingratitude, if not insulted outrageously ; and their firm belief in their wrongs was supersaturated with bitterness. The mood of that goddess excluded from the wedding feast, or of that fairy forgotten at the christening, may well have been enviable in comparison, since all the world has heard tell how they gave expression to their resentment with a satisfactory thoroughness far beyond the reach of any little farming folk "looking as sulky as a pig" at one another on a lonely Donegal bog. Although the latter had certainly no wish to conceal their state of mind, pride forbade them to manifest it in public by utterances more explicit than enigmatical innuendoes, coupled with the cast of countenance aforesaid ; and this helped to keep the origin of the grievance in obscurity, thereby lessening the chances of an explanation.

Consequently, before many weeks went by, all Meenaclochran had begun to remark with interest that "Nolans and M'Nultys weren't so very great these times, whatever ailed them ;" and soon afterwards it became clear that they were "black out altogether."

The estrangement may perhaps have gratified two or three mischief-makers ; it undoubtedly caused much distress to more than one of the persons most concerned. Generally speaking, it was regarded as an inconvenient and untoward occurrence, and if it had made a newspaper paragraph, might have been said, with more than

average truth, to have thrown a gloom over the whole parish. On nobody, however, did it produce less effect than on the pair who had brought it about. Dinny Breen and John Hickey, being but slightly acquainted with either of the affronted parties, and finding their chief pleasure in the company of their terriers, stravading over the hills and bogs, were equally ignorant and unconcerned about this detail in the social affairs of their neighbourhood. They might have stated accurately that it was "all one to them so long as they could be gettin' after the rabbits, and birds and troutses."

But as the autumn waned into winter, diminishing their opportunities for those favourite pursuits, they found themselves impelled to devise other pastimes. And one tedious morning in Christmas week, said Dinny to John: "D'you mind the day a while ago you and me was bringin' round word of a party to Nolans and M'Nultys, and divil a bit of it we brought them at all?"

"I do so, bedad," said John. "That was the time we got the three brace of snipe up at the end of the lough, and took them home along wid the rabbits sittin' in the middle of two big loads of bracken, and me hayro of war at the barracks"—he referred to the police sergeant—"lookin' over the gate at us and we goin' by."

"Because," said Dinny, "I was thinkin' why wouldn't we be bringin' it to them now? Better late than never, as the man said when he ate the bad egg. We needn't be tellin' them what

Saturday it was, so they'll never suppose but it's the next, that's St Stephen's Day. I'd like to see what ould Anastasia M'Nulty would say to it. There's apt to be some quare talk out of her, for Mick Gahan was tellin' me she's ragin' mad agin all the Nolans this while back, whatever's took her."

"Lookin' as bitter as sut at one another they are this long time, sure enough. Troth now, I wouldn't wonder if the whole pack of them would be leppin' over it," John said hopefully. "I'm passin' by Nolan's place this evenin', and I could as aisy as not look in."

"And I'll leg it over to M'Nulty's," said Dinny, "for I might as well be doin' one thing as another."

The two friends executed their design without difficulty, but, so far as John Hickey was concerned, with somewhat disappointing results. For when he put his head in at the Nolans' back door, he saw nobody except Mrs Peter, rolling out a flour cake on the table, and in reply to his communication all she said was: "Musha, I hope they're well," with an air of the utmost composure. Then to his inquiry whether he should convey an answer for her, she rejoined simply and placidly: "Ah, go and fish." So that he retired with a sense of failure.

Dinny Breen's adventures were more interesting as he found at home Mrs Anastasia M'Nulty who received his misleading message with a tirade which almost came up to his expectations in

vehemence and vigour. She ended an impassioned critique upon the characters and conduct of the Nolan family, past and present, by requesting him to tell them from her that unless they "kep' their impidence to themselves they would be very apt to get it back, along wid somethin' they might happen not to like," which Dinny solemnly promised to do. Whereupon, as he was passing the haggart gate, out after him sped Molly M'Nulty, who must have been running along the other side of the dyke on purpose to intercept him, and who breathlessly explained that "he needn't repeat e'er a word her grandmother was after sayin', for she'd seemed in a quare cross humour the whole day, and didn't mane anythin' at all, good or bad." So Dinny more honestly pledged himself on no account to deliver Mrs M'Nulty's refusal.

Now these things would scarcely have helped the most acute and furthest-sighted to predict what did actually happen on that next Saturday evening, or to account for it with any certainty. Who, indeed, can say how it came about? But whether through the genial influence of the season, or a limited choice of gaieties, through amity or *ennui*, *Liebe oder Langeweile*, the fact is that in a moonless obscurity between seven and eight o'clock two parties of people, coming from opposite directions, rushed almost into one another's arms on Tackaberry's Bridge as they fled towards the willow tree for shelter from a shower of rattling hailstones.

"Musha, good gracious! and is it yourself, Mrs M'Nulty, ma'am?" said Julia Nolan, becoming aware of whom she had jostled against. "Maybe it's too soon we are, then, steppin' over to your place?"

"Pather Nolan, begorrah—I didn't expect to see you till we got to the farm," said Art M'Nulty. "And what way at all are you facin' the now?"

Meanwhile Peter's eldest son was shaking hands interminably with Art's youngest daughter, and saying: "And how's yourself this long time, Molly ashore? Sure I haven't seen a sight of you for a month of Sundays."

"Somebody's after makin' fools of us, that's the truth," declared Joe M'Nulty when facts had been stated.

"And a dale our best plan then," said Peter Nolan, "is to not be made fools of. Just step along home wid us the whole of yous, the way you was intindin', and 'twill be a comical thing if we can't get a drop out of the bottle, and a scrape off of the fiddle handy enough."

Well and good, as the old *shanachies* say. Peter's suggestion was unanimously adopted; and since shortly afterwards the neighbours were not only remarking how "M'Nultys and Nolans had patched it up," but were also agreeably excited by the prospect of "young Pather Nolan and Molly M'Nulty gettin' married at the Shrove," we may perhaps regard the results of this second misdeed on the part of Dinny and

John as an exception to the rule that two wrongs don't make a right. Still, by way of a better moral, we should bear in mind that only for the opportune clatter of the hail-shower the consequences would probably have been widely different. For if the two families had passed each other by unbeknownst in the dark, to arrive cold and wet at empty, shut-up houses, it is hard to say what complications might not have ensued. The chances certainly are that no such wedding would have taken place at the Shrove-tide, if indeed it had not been put off hopelessly for ever and a day. So great are the perils that environ practical jokers and their victims.

FOR COMPANY

LARRY BEHAN, stepping over from Loughmore to Clochranbeg, a few perches short of the Silver Lane met with Joe Hedican, leading his sorrel mare, and said to him: "What at all ails yous?"

"Is it what ails us?" said Joe.

"Sure what else?" said Larry. "And the mare in a lather and a thrimble, and yourself comin' along as unstuddy as a thing on wires. Lookin' fit to drop down of a hape together the two of yous are."

"And why wouldn't we have a right to be?" said Joe, "and ourselves just after behouldin' what we won't either of us be the better for till the day we're waked."

"Bedad then, that same's the plisant talk for me to be hearin', wid the light darkenin' before me every minyit," said Larry, "And so it's wakin' th' ould mare you'll be one of these days, says you? Well now, I niver heard the like of that. But, to be sure, I'm not very long in the County Donegal. I hope you'll send me word of the buryin', for I'd be sorry to miss it. 'Tis the comical notion, if you come to considher it."

He laughed, upon considheration, with much noise, at anyrate, but as the mare rolled her eyes wildly at him, and Joe only shook his head the more ominously, he withdrew abruptly from their unsympathetic countenances, though he persisted in his guffaw. When he had gone half a dozen yards he faced round and shouted: "Might you happen to know is the Garveys' boat in yet?" Joe, however, was just mounting, and he plunged off at full speed, without seeming to hear. "Fine floundherin' and bouncin' about he has, and be hanged to him, himself and his ould baste," Larry said with indignation. "If I thought the Garveys were like to be stoppin' out late I'd lave it till to-morra, and turn back now, but I couldn't tell I mightn't lose the job altogether wid delayin'."

This was not the risk he chose to run, and he presently reached the entrance of the high-banked, winding boreen, whence he threw a look backwards in hopes that some fellow-travellers might be catching him up. Nothing, however, moved on the lonely moorland road behind him except the gallop of Joe Hedican's horse hurling itself in the wrong direction. So he went forward without the prospect of any company.

The Silver Lane twists through an undulating sea of softly heaped-up mounds, scantily clad with bent-grass, pale and dry, and dark, harsh-textured furzes. These are rooted in almost pure sand, silvery hued, yet under strong sunbeams yielding dim golden glimmers that give a

faint purple to the shadow in its curves and folds. But the touch of this March evening's twilight left it all cold white and grey. It lies deep and powdery on the narrow roadway, so that a man has not even the sound of his own footsteps to reassure him, should he be disposed to feel lonesome and apprehensive. Larry Behan was feeling both as he passed the second sharp turn of the lane and came to a place where a crevice-like path pierced the sandhill on his left. Here he noticed several huge hoof-prints, some of them impressed with violence upon the low buttresses and ledges of the banks, which, in the ordinary course of things, no horse would have trodden.

"Hereabouts it is they seen whatever it was frightened them," he said to himself, "and set the mare prancin' and dancin'. 'Twas the quare capers she had. Between us and harm—look where she flounced right across the road, and scraped herself up agin the furze bush : her hair's thick on it."

He was hastening on, longing and dreading to be round the next corner, when he heard close by a sound—such a homely, commonplace one that he experienced hardly a moment of panic before out of the little by-path ran a very small boy, swinging a large tin can. As a general rule Larry would have seen nothing particularly attractive about the black-headed, bare-footed, flannel-petticoated gossoon, and would probably have allowed him to pass on unaccosted. But in the present circum-

for an innocent child is the most efficacious safeguard possible when uncanny things are about. Another encouraging reflection also occurred to him immediately: "'Twas that now, and divil a thing else scared the two of them—the little brat skytin' by, clatterin' his can, and the light shinin' off it on a suddint." Still, this view of the matter, though plausible and rational, was not quite certain enough to justify him in letting slip the chance of an escort, and he therefore set about engaging the child in conversation. He did so rather clumsily, for lack of the familiarity with children's society which would have enabled him to fill up the gap between thirty odd and five years old with appropriate small-talk.

"Is it goin' for water you was, sonny?" he said.

"She sent me to the well again," said the gossoon, stopping his trot and pointing up the little path to a tangle of briars and long grass in a slight hollow.

"And is it gone dry on you?" said Larry, looking into the empty can.

The reply was a turning of it upside down to show a crack that ran for several inches round the bottom rim. "I can put the top of me littlest finger right through it," the gossoon said and proved. "It won't hould e'er a sup at all. And the big jug's broke too."

"That's a bad job," said Larry.

"There's nothin' she can be sendin' now unless the black kettle itself, that's as much as I can

do to lift when it's empty inside, let alone full—it's the size of meself, bedad," averred Larry's protector.

"Sure then, she couldn't ax you to be carryin' that. Is it far you come?" Larry inquired with some anxiety.

"I dunno," said the gossoon. "But it's a terrible ould baste of a big kettle for always wantin' to be filled. I hate the sight of it sittin' there on the fire, wid the dirty ould suttly lid tryin' to lep off it; and then Herself does be bawlin' to me to run out agin and bring the water before it's boiled dry. I do be sick and tired of goin' up the lane wid the heavy can pullin' out the arm of me all the way back; fit to destroy me, Katty Lonergan says it is. And a while ago I was givin' it a couple of clumps agin' a stone, where I seen a weeny crack comin'; so maybe that's what began it. But you needn't let on, or I'll be kilt. Sorra a sup it 'ill hould."

He dropped some small handfuls of the fine sand into the can, and holding it up watched the grains sift slowly out. This experiment he repeated more than once, and Larry, albeit in a hurry, looked on with prudent patience. But at last he suggested: "Mightn't she be mad if you're too long delayin'?"

"She does be mad most whiles," his companion said philosophically, "and I don't so much mind if she won't be sendin' me back wid the ugly ould kettle."

However, he began to walk on, rattling a couple

of cockle-shells that had remained in the can. Larry kept close beside him, and meekly waited when he occasionally stopped to pick up pebbles, or explore rabbit-holes, or start sand-avalanches and cascades by tugging at the colourless roots of the grasses in the slithery banks. It was a slow progress, and the dusk had grown perceptibly greyer by the time that Larry emerged from between them, at a place where the road branches, on the right towards Clochranbeg, on the left towards the great Bog of Greilish.

"And what way are you goin', avic?" Larry inquired with less anxiety now, having left behind the Silver Lane, which he knew to be the most perilous stage of his journey.

The child pointed to a small cabin standing opposite, a stone's throw back from the road; a reply that somewhat surprised Larry. For even through the gathering dimness the place looked quite ruinous and deserted, with rifted roof, and rank weeds peering in at frameless windows.

"She's screechin' to me," said the gossoon, and darted off, making for the door. Larry heard nothing but the cockle-shells clattering in the can. "There's no sort of people," he said to himself, "would be livin' in the likes of that, unless it was tinkers stoppin' awhile. But I see ne'er a sign of an ass or a cart in it. Well now, he was the quare little imp—himself and the big kettle."

A bit further on he overtook the Widow Nolan, who was going his way, and as they walked along

together he casually asked of her how the Silver Lane had come by its bad name. "For," he said, "since I'm in this parish I met wid many that do be afeared of it, but what's wrong wid it I niver happint to hear tell."

"Sure it was before my time," said Mrs Nolan. "There used to be a woman livin' in th' ould empty house you seen at this end of it, and a little boy belongin' to her, that she gave bad treatment to. Huntin' him off she was continual to fetch her in big cans full of water out of the well up near the far end of the lane, that you might be noticin' goin' by. So one day she sent him wid a great heavy lump of a kettle he couldn't rightly lift, and tryin' to fill it the crathur over-balanced himself and fell in after his head, and was got dead-drowned. And ever since then it does be walkin' there now and agin; and folks say there's no worser bad luck goin' than for a body to see a sight of it, or to so much as hear the clink of the can—well, man alive, what's took you at all?"

"The Lord have mercy on me this day," said Larry, "and meself just after walkin' alongside of it, and talkin' to it, the len'th of the boreen."

And thenceforward neither of them had any breath to spare for conversation until they at last reached distant—still cruelly distant—Cloch-ranbeg.

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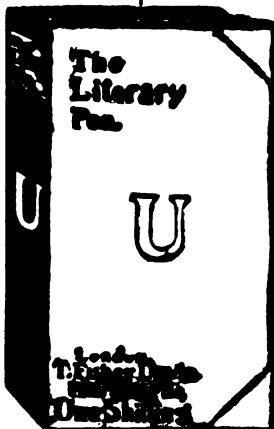
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